

**Traditional Woven Textiles:  
Tradition and Identity Construction  
in the 'New State' of Brunei Darussalam.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since its independence in 1984, politicians and nationalists in Brunei Darussalam have appealed to traditions in their efforts to create a national identity based on Brunei Darussalam's national philosophy, 'Malay Islamic Monarchy'. Weaving is one of the traditions related to Brunei traditional culture, thus traditional textile is used to construct national identity. This study focuses on the role played by powerful institutions in the creation of new tradition in order to foster national awareness in the 'new state' of Brunei Darussalam and I examine how traditional textiles are incorporated into the project of nation building.

In Bruneian society, traditional woven cloths have multiple roles whose meanings vary according to the situation in which the traditional cloth is utilized. This research explores the significance of traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam, focusing on the consumption of locally woven textiles in its traditions and the relationships to the expression and construction of identity.

Since Islam came to Brunei Darussalam, it has become one of the predominant markers of identity of the Malays. This study analyse the influence of Islam in the production and consumption of traditional textile in Brunei Darussalam. The continuity of the production and consumption of traditional woven textile in Brunei Darussalam is very much dependent on its significant in the traditions of Brunei society as a whole. In order to prove this, this study focuses its investigation upon the production and uses of traditional textiles in the social customs of Malay society in Brunei Darussalam.

Traditional woven textiles are employed to construct social identity in the reproduction of distinction. Traditional textiles are also offered to signify privilege and power. I examine how traditional textile is being used to distinguish social status and political prominence, denote offices, and display wealth and prestige.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	v
<b>List of Map</b>	vii
<b>List of Tables</b>	vii
<b>List of Plates</b>	viii
<b>Glossary</b>	xiii
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Creating Tradition in Contemporary Brunei Darussalam</b>
	Introduction 1
	The Contextualisation of Textiles 3
	The Notion of Tradition 4
	The Conceptual Entity of Tradition in Brunei Darussalam. 7
	Textiles and Identity 9
	The Process of Identification 10
	Textiles and Nationalism 14
	Transformation and Continuity 16
	Methodology and Personal Position 17
	Organisation of the Thesis 23
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Locating the Scene: Brunei Darussalam in Brief</b>
	Introduction 26
	Physical Features 26
	Official Language 27
	Economy 28
	Historical Trajectories 28
	Ethnic Composition in Brunei Darussalam 33
	The Conceptualisation of ‘Malayness’ in the Context of the Brunei Darussalam Situation. 35
	Social Organisation 38
	System of Kinship and Marriage 39
	Political Structure 40
	Institutional Structure of Religion 54
	Conclusion 55
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Globalisation and Islamisation: Interacting Influences in the Transformation of Modes of Attire.</b>
	Introduction 58
	Early Clothing in Brunei Darussalam 60
	Indigenous Male Attire 61
	Court Appearances 69
	Female Attire 76

	Factors Contributing to the Evolution and Transformation of Clothing	86
	Conclusion	89
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>The Traditional; Woven Textiles: Production, Structure and Islamic Influence.</b>	
	Introduction	92
	Early Literature on the Production of Traditional Woven Textiles	92
	Historical Background	94
	The Notion of Aesthetic Representation	96
	The Composition and Structure of Design	97
	The Sources and Symbolism of the Motifs and Design	103
	Types, Patterns and Designs of Traditional Woven Textiles	110
	The Evolution and Innovation of the Motifs and Designs	122
	Conclusion	124
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Rites of Passage: Social Custom and the Influence of Islam.</b>	
	Introduction	126
	Wedding Ceremonies	128
	Uses of Traditional Textiles in other Malay Ethnic Groups	157
	The Celebration of the New Mother and First Child	160
	Circumcision and Puberty	163
	Funerals	167
	Influences of Foreign Textiles	171
	Conclusion	173
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>The Courtly Dress Code: Representation of Power and Markers of Status.</b>	
	Introduction	175
	Birthday Celebration of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam	176
	<i>Istiadat Perbarisan Diraja</i>	177
	<i>Istiadat Mengadap dan Pengurniaan Pingat dan Bintang-Bintang Kebesaran.</i>	191
	Investiture Ceremony	195
	The Symbolism of the Ceremonial Dress	201
	Robe of Honour	207
	Conclusion	209

<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Creating New Tradition.</b>	
	Introduction	212
	Continuation of the Weaving Tradition	214
	The Inventions of Traditions	217
	The Representation of National Identity Based Upon Malay Culture	239
	Conclusion	248
 <b>Chapter 8</b>	 <b>Exhibition and Commercialisation: Redefinition of National Identity.</b>	
	Introduction	251
	The Politics of Museums	254
	The Process of Nationalisation of Heritage	265
	Commercialisation	276
	Conclusion	279
 <b>Chapter 9</b>	 <b>Conclusion</b>	 282
 <b>Bibliography</b>		 293

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**List of Map:**

1	Map of Brunei Darussalam	27
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**List of Tables:**

1	The Honorific chart	48
2	Colour Symbolism in Universiti Brunei Darussalam and Brunei Royal Court	241
3	The Lyrics of the <i>Kain Jong sarat</i>	273



## List of Plates:

1	The higher non-noble officials seated in accordance with their rank	46
2	The wives of the dignitaries sit next to their spouses	46
3	The Sultan returning the gesture of respect	49
4	Umbrella bearers standing behind dignitaries	50
5	The Supreme Vizier escorted by four royal regalia bearers	51
6	A man wearing loincloth	62
7	<i>Timbaran</i> jacket	63
8	Kedayan man wearing his ethnic 'traditional' costume	65
9	A group of men wearing <i>baju cara Melayu</i>	66
10	Murut Male and females wearing 'traditional' ethnic costume	67
11	Bisaya man in his 'traditional' ethnic costume	68
12	<i>Baju begulambir</i>	68
13	Participants marching past wearing national attire during the Anniversary Brunei Darussalam's National Day in 2003	69
14	Dignitaries of Brunei Darussalam wearing their ceremonial costume	70
15	Both traditional and western types of clothing worn at formal functions	72
16	The Sultan and Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam wearing Malay traditional attire	72
17	Men wearing <i>baju ala cara Melayu (Baju MIB)</i>	73
18	Men wearing jeans and casual shirts	74
19	High non-noble man's headgear	75
20	Noble man's headgear	75
21	Kedayan's male headgear	76
22	Ladies wearing blouse and <i>kain selendang</i>	77
23	Traditional costume of Murut female	78
24	Murut female headgear	78
25	Belait female traditional costume	79
26	Bisaya ceremonial costumes	80
27	The Queen of Brunei Darussalam wearing <i>Baju kebaya</i>	81
28	The daughters of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam wearing <i>baju fesyen kurung moden</i>	82
29	Female guest wearing <i>kain kapit</i>	82
30	Two types of Malay traditional dresses for female	84
31	Women officers of the Royal Brunei Police Force	85
32	Female students in their school uniform	86
33	Male tunic	98
34	Female top	98
35	Trousers for male	98
36	Skirt for female	98
37	Layout of a standard <i>sinjang</i> or sarong	99
38	Fabric for headgear	100

39	Belt/sash	101
40	Cloth made into functional items	103
41	<i>Air mulih</i> motif	107
42	<i>Kain Jong sarat</i> design	115
43	<i>Kain Sukmaindera</i> design	116
44	<i>Kain Si Pugut</i>	117
45	<i>Kain Si Lubang bangsi</i>	118
46	<i>Kain Liputan madu</i>	118
47	<i>Kain Bunga Bertabur</i>	120
48	<i>Susunan Kain Bercorak</i>	120
49	<i>Kain Melintang</i>	121
50	<i>Kain Beragi</i>	122
51	Representatives from both groom and bride at the <i>Majlis menghantar tanda</i>	131
52	The delegation of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam at the marker of the engagement ceremony	132
53	The presentation of bride settlement and wedding gifts ceremony between the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and Dayangku Sarah	134
54	Traditional woven cloths for wedding exchange	136
55	Set of wedding gifts	137
56	<i>Langkah dulang</i>	138
57	Countergifts from the bride	139
58	Solemnisation ceremony of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam	141
59	The <i>jurunikah</i> declares his authority at the solemnisation ceremony	141
60	A powdering day ceremony held for the bride	143
61	The powdering night ceremony of a groom	144
62	The Queen of Brunei Darussalam applying powder paste	144
63	Powdering night ceremony for commoner bride	145
64	The bride of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam at her powdering night ceremony	146
65	The powdering paste	147
66	The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam during his henna tinting ceremony	148
67	Commoner groom henna tinting ceremony	148
68	The bride of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam during her henna tinting ceremony	149
69	<i>Majlis Bersanding</i>	150
70	The groom touching his bride's forehead	152
71	The Royal couple sit on the dais	153
72	<i>Majlis berambil-ambilan</i>	154
73	The Royal wedding Banquet	155
74	The Royal couple during the <i>Muleh Tiga Hari</i> ceremony	156
75	Bisaya and Dusun wedding	157

76	Dusun groom gives traditional woven textile for wedding exchange	158
77	Traditional woven cloth used to decorate wooden mortar at Kedayan wedding	159
78	The New mother and her first child	162
79	Incision ceremony of a girl	164
80	Traditional cloth was made into a gown and worn by the girl at her incision ceremony	166
81	The girls wearing a <i>kain kapit</i> at their puberty ceremony	167
82	Traditional cloths used to envelop the coffin	169
83	Ceremonial dress for <i>Cheteria</i> 4	179
84	Ceremonial dress for additional <i>Cheteria</i> 4	179
85	Ceremonial dress for <i>Cheteria</i> 8	180
86	Ceremonial dress for <i>Cheteria</i> 16	180
87	Ceremonial dress for additional <i>Cheteria</i> 16	181
88	Ceremonial dress for <i>Cheteria</i> 32	181
89	Ceremonial dress for the higher non-noble officials	182
90	Ceremonial dress for <i>Manteri Hulubalang</i>	183
91	Ceremonial dress for <i>Manteri Pedalaman</i>	183
92	Sketch of ceremonial dress of the Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers	184
93	Cabinet Minister in his ceremonial dress	185
94	Deputy Cabinet Minister in his ceremonial dress	185
95	<i>Kain Jong sarat bunga teratai</i> , ceremonial dress for senior administrative officials	186
96	Traditional commandants in their ceremonial dress	188
97	Official from Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara in his ceremonial uniform	189
98	March Past event during the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's 56 <sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary	190
99	Female senior official in her ceremonial dress	192
100	The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam during his 56 <sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary	193
101	The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam honouring a medal to a recipient	194
102	Orang Kaya Maha Bijaya Haji Othman and members of his family after his inauguration ceremony	196
103	The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam during his proclamation ceremony	197
104	The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam and his sons	199
105	Inauguration ceremony	200
106	Royal wedding in 1967	204
107	<i>Cheteria</i> attending the Royal Marching ceremony during the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam 56 <sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary	207
108	Robe of Honour	209

109	Cloth weaving course at the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre	215
110	Trainee copying the motif on the loom	217
111	Convocation ceremony of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam	221
112	Advance Diploma of Education graduands	222
113	Sample of the trimming of the Chancellor's academic gown	223
114	Sample of the trimming for the Pro-Chancellor's academic gown	223
115	The Pro-Chancellor of Universiti Brunei Darussalam	224
116	Principal officers at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam	225
117	The Chancellor of Universiti Brunei Darussalam awarding a certificate	226
118	Participants of the <i>Khatam Al-Quran</i> ceremony	229
119	Female participants of <i>Khatam Al-Quran</i> ceremony wearing <i>kain kapit</i>	229
120	Male guests wearing <i>baju kebangsaan</i>	230
121	Female guests at the <i>Khatam Al-Quran</i> ceremony	230
123	The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam put on the garland to the recipient of Teacher's Day award	232
124	Recipients of Teachers' Day Awards	233
125	Traditional Tutong Wedding	234
126	The Sultan receiving gift	235
127	<i>Bunga putar</i> motif used in architecture	236
128	The reciters of <i>syair</i> and <i>sajak</i> during National Day in 2003	237
129	Field performance during National Day in 2004	238
130	Female participants in March Past during National Day in 2004	239
131	The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam with Newly Appointed Diplomats	242
132	Uniform of the Board of Directors of Islamic Bank of Brunei	243
133	Uniform for male staff of Islamic Bank of Brunei	244
134	Brunei Malay wedding on display at the Brunei Museum	257
135	The bride and groom sitting-in state on exhibit	258
136	Weaving display	259
137	Different designs of woven textiles on exhibition	260
138	Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien signing the Brunei Constitution	265
139	The Main Hall at the International Convention Centre	266
140	The Minister of Development's meeting room	267
141	The <i>Arab gegati</i> conference room at Ministry of Development	268
142	Different designs of traditional woven cloths used for textbook covers	269
143	Programme books and souvenirs at National Day of Brunei Darussalam	270
144	Invitation card to National Day Seminar 2004	271
145	Gift bags	272
146	Account book and ATM card at Islamic Development Bank of Brunei	274
147	Desktop calendars	274

148	Gift bag and wrapping	275
149	Traditional woven cloth souvenirs	279

## GLOSSARY

<i>Adat</i>	Custom.
<i>Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah</i>	The Sunni followers.
<i>Alai ukoi</i>	A dance to celebrate the return of the head-hunters among Murut.
<i>Arat</i>	Belt.
<i>Awang</i>	Traditionally, a title of a male of aristocrat descents, but now generally used for all commoner males.
<i>Awangku</i>	A title of unmarried noble.
<i>Baju cara Melayu begulambir</i>	A type of traditional Malay costume for male.
<i>Baju cara Melayu butang lima</i>	A type of traditional Malay costume for male.
<i>Baju cara Melayu teluk belanga</i>	A type of traditional Malay costume for male.
<i>Baju jubah/ gamis</i>	A long dress of Arabic style.
<i>Baju Cara Melayu cekak musang</i>	A type of traditional Malay costume for male.
<i>Baju kebaya</i>	Traditional clothing of Malay women.
<i>Baju kurung</i>	Traditional clothing of Malay women.
<i>Baling</i>	Motif used in traditional woven cloth.
<i>Belait</i>	One of the districts in Brunei Darussalam; One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam – Belait ethnic group.
<i>Belanja dapur</i>	Kitchen expenses given by a groom to his bride for as part of wedding settlement.
<i>Berian</i>	Bride price/ bride settlement.

<i>Bersama rakyat</i>	A programme organised annually in commemoration to the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday. This programme provides the people of Brunei Darussalam to interact with the Sultan.
Bisaya	One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam – Bisaya ethnic group.
Borneo Bulletin	The English newspaper in Brunei Darussalam, which also can be accessed on line.
Brudirect	One of on-line news of Brunei Darussalam's website.
<i>Bunga telapok</i>	Motif of traditional woven cloth.
<i>Cheongsam</i>	Traditional clothing of Chinese women.
<i>Cheteria</i>	Traditional noble officials.
<i>Chiri</i>	The letter of credential.
<i>Dastar</i>	Specially folded head gear.
<i>Datin Paduka</i>	A title of woman who is honoured by the Sultan on her own merit.
<i>Dato</i>	Title honoured upon a male by the Sultan.
<i>Dayang</i>	Traditionally, a title of a female of aristocrat descents, but now generally used for all commoner females.
<i>Dayangku</i>	A title of either an unmarried noble female or a noble female who is married to a commoner.
Dusun	One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam - Dusun ethnic group.
<i>Eid ul-Fitr</i>	Islamic festival after the month of Ramadhan.
<i>Gelang pengaluan</i>	Set of seven bangles on each side tied together and usually worn by groom and bride at their wedding ceremonies.
<i>Hajah</i>	A title of a female who had performed the

	pilgrimage to Mecca.
<i>Haji</i>	A title of a male who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.
Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara	Department of State Customs.
<i>Jong sarat bunga batu berkait</i>	Traditional woven cloth design.
<i>Jong sarat bunga melati</i>	Traditional woven cloth design.
<i>Jong sarat bunga padi</i>	Traditional woven cloth design.
<i>Kain jong sarat</i>	One of the designs of traditional woven cloth.
<i>Kain kapit</i>	A piece of sarong like cloth, usually of traditional woven cloth, worn by women around the mid-body over their clothing.
<i>Kain kipar</i>	Coarse material made of cotton.
<i>Kain liputan madu</i>	One of the designs of traditional woven cloth.
<i>Kain Si lubang bangsi</i>	One of the designs of traditional woven cloth.
<i>Kain Si Lubang Bangsi liputan badu berpakan</i>	Traditional woven cloth design.
<i>Kain Si Pugut</i>	One of the designs of traditional woven cloth.
<i>Kain Sukmaindera</i>	One of the designs of traditional woven cloth.
<i>Kampong</i>	Village.
Kampong Ayer	Water Village– one of the landmarks and settlements in Brunei Darussalam.
<i>Kaskol</i>	Gold betel container.
Kedayan	One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam – Kedayan ethnic group.
<i>Ketua Kampong</i>	Head of a village.



<i>Lapau</i>	Parliamentary House.
<i>Majlis malam berambil-ambilan</i>	Sitting-on-the dais held in the evening of wedding ceremony (Acquiring night ceremony).
<i>Manteri Darat</i>	Lower non-noble traditional official – Interior land officers
<i>Manteri Hulubalang</i>	Lower non-noble traditional official – Defence officers.
<i>Manteri Istana</i>	Lower non-noble traditional official – Palace officers.
<i>Manteri Pedalaman</i>	Lower non-noble traditional official – Rural officers
<i>Melayu Islam Beraja</i>	Malay Islamic Monarchy - The national philosophy of Brunei Darussalam.
<i>Mudapun</i>	Necklace usually worn by a groom during his wedding.
<i>Mudim</i>	Inaugurated religious officials.
<i>Murut</i>	One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam – Murut ethnic group.
<i>Panglima Asgar</i>	Title of a lower non-noble traditional official – Defence Commandant.
<i>Panglima Raja</i>	Title of a lower non-noble traditional official – Royal Commandant.
<i>Pehin</i>	High non-noble traditional official to have been inaugurated with a <i>chiri</i> .
<i>Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja</i>	Title of high non-noble traditional official of rank 8.
<i>Pehin Orang Kaya Digadong</i>	Title of high non-noble traditional official of rank 4.
<i>Pehin Orang Kaya Maharaja Diraja</i>	Title of high non-noble traditional official of rank 8.

<i>Pehin Orang Kaya Maharaja Kerna</i>	Title of high non-noble traditional official of rank 32.
<i>Pelita Brunei</i>	One of the government official papers issued weekly on Wednesday and can also be accessed on-line.
<i>Pembuka mulut</i>	Certain amount of money given to the bride at the marker of engagement ceremony.
<i>Penghulu</i>	A person elected to head a dwelling place which comprises several villages – Chief.
<i>Pengiran</i>	Title of a noble.
<i>Pengiran Bendahara</i>	Title of one of the viziers.
<i>Pengiran Digadong</i>	Title of one of the viziers.
<i>Pengiran Kerma Negara</i>	A noble official of a rank 16.
<i>Pengiran Pemanca</i>	Title of one of the viziers.
<i>Pengiran Penggawa Laila Bentara Istiadat Diraja Dalam Istana</i>	Title of one of the traditional noble officials of additional rank 16.
<i>Pengiran Perdana Wazir</i>	The Supreme Vizier.
<i>Pengiran Temanggong</i>	Title of one of the viziers.
<i>Puak Brunei</i>	One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam – Brunei ethnic group.
<i>Pucuk rebung</i>	Bamboo shoot (triangular shape) motif used in weaving.
Radio Television Brunei	National Broadcasting in Brunei Darussalam.
<i>Si Ganggung</i>	Motif used in traditional woven cloth.
<i>Sinjang</i>	Short sarong worn by men over their traditional costume.
<i>Songket</i>	Traditional woven cloth particularly popular in Malaysia.

<i>Songkok</i>	Black velvet cap.
<i>Sultan</i>	Ruler.
<i>Sunnah</i>	Tradition of Prophet Mohammad.
<i>Syawal</i>	The month after Ramadhan of the Islamic calendar.
<i>Tauliah</i>	Letter of Commission
<i>Teroko</i>	Special headgear decorated with feathers and was privileged for the Belait warriors.
<i>Timbaran</i>	Bark used to make cloth; Sp. Artocarpus tamaran.
<i>Tutong</i>	One of the districts in Brunei Darussalam; One of the Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam – Tutong ethnic group.

## **Chapter One**

### **Creating Tradition in Contemporary Brunei Darussalam.**

#### **Introduction:**

In Bruneian society, traditional woven cloths have multiple roles whose meanings vary according to the situation in which the traditional cloth is utilized. Following Lubar's (1996) and Prown's (1996) approach in seeing artefacts as evidence of cultural phenomena, constructs embodying both conscious and unconscious reflections of their makers and users, this thesis explores the interrelation between textiles, ideas and people in contemporary Brunei society. I emphasise how production and consumption of traditional woven textiles convey attachments to national values, religious and political affiliations, and class, ethnic and cultural solidarity (Thomas 2001:143). In this thesis I examine the role of traditional woven textile in Brunei Darussalam today. I propose that these clothes are important symbols used by the state to promote Brunei Darussalam as a unified Malay Islamic Monarchy.

By referring to contemporary Brunei society, I am not overlooking the long history of the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam because since its independence in 1984, politicians and nationalists in Brunei Darussalam have appealed to traditions in their efforts to create a national identity based on Brunei Darussalam's national philosophy, '*Melayu Islam Beraja*' (Malay Islamic Monarchy). Weaving is one of the traditions related to Brunei traditional culture, thus traditional textile is used to construct national identity. In this thesis, I emphasise the use of textiles as a medium through which to express the continuity between the past and present in the creation of contemporary Brunei national identity. I argue that the use of traditional woven textiles has been manipulated by nationalists and officials in government institutions, especially during 'the post-protectorate era', to support the construction of Bruneian national identity.

Traditional textiles are in common use throughout Brunei society today. They are worn as part of clothing, displayed and used in a plethora of other paraphernalia in the state's organised functions and commemorations. Therefore,

I emphasise how the consumption of traditional textiles within Malay society has created a sense of commonality in the society, thus granting the status of national icons to these textiles.

In their historical accounts about Brunei, foreign travellers who visited Brunei during the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as Chau Jua Kua (Mohd Jamil 2000), Maryatt (Leake 1990) and Pigafetta (Nicholl 1975), noted that woven cloths were worn by dignitaries of Brunei in the royal court and women from rich families. They also noted that such textiles were used as curtains in the royal hall and given as gifts to visitors. The *Silsilah Raja-Raja Berunai* (The Genealogy of Brunei Rulers), edited and annotated by Amin Sweeney (1998) also mentions that woven cloth were used as ceremonial dress at royal weddings and at the installations of the King to the throne. Other articles and research by Noor Ehsan (2004), Rusli (1984) and Mohd.Yussop (2003) on marriage within Malay society in Brunei Darussalam mentions that traditional cloths are worn by both bride and groom, and that such textiles are also prominently used in wedding exchanges and as ornamental objects at weddings.

In the Brunei royal court today, traditional woven cloths are still extensively used, especially at ceremonies such as the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday, royal weddings and investiture ceremonies. At these ceremonies, people wear different colours and motifs of traditional textiles as part of the ceremonial dress and royal regalia. When foreign delegations visit Brunei Darussalam, often they are presented with a piece of traditional cloth as a souvenir. Now they are also worn at other social and formal functions. These woven cloths are part of traditional costumes, especially for men, and are used as interior decoration in many private residences and government buildings. Images of traditional textiles can also be seen on modern media, such as book covers and calendars.

The significance of traditional textiles goes beyond clothing and ornamentation. In this thesis I explore the significance of traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam today, by focusing on the consumption of locally woven textiles and the relationships between textiles and the expression and construction

of identity. The significance of tradition in ensuring that the production and consumption of such textiles continues is another aspect that I investigate in this thesis.

Brunei weavers are among the producers in Southeast Asia of fine, traditional woven textiles (Shunmugam 2003). However, this is not common knowledge due to lack of research at both regional and international levels. While there has been extensive study of textiles and their relationship to social and cultural context in the rest of Southeast Asia (see Howard 1994), little attention has been paid to Brunei Darussalam. What research has been published on weaving tradition and the use of traditional textiles for ceremonial dress in Brunei consists of only very brief accounts (Andaya 1992; Fraser-Lu 1988; Siti Zainon 1997; Waugh 1990). Other articles written by local researchers are often brief descriptive accounts focusing on the production of traditional textiles (Masnah 1996; Pengiran Ismail 1997; Siti Norkhalbi 1999). The role of traditional textiles and their connections to social relationships in Brunei Darussalam have been understudied.

In this thesis, I investigate the many uses of traditional woven textiles in Brunei society, including rites of passage marking transitions in the life cycle, such as wedding, birth, death, bestowal of titles and graduation from University. I also analyse how such textiles are used to reconstruct cultural identity and to preserve cultural heritage in the discourse of nationalism. Based on my empirical findings, I focus on the practical and symbolic meanings that have emerged from the production and consumption of traditional textiles.

### **The Contextualisation of Textiles.**

My particular focus is on the traditional woven textiles produced locally in Brunei Darussalam and generally known as *kain tenunan Brunei* (Brunei woven cloth). I use the term ‘traditional’ to refer to hand made, locally woven textiles to distinguish them from other types of textiles that are also manufactured in Brunei Darussalam. Furthermore, the employment of traditional (non-machine operated) weaving implements and techniques in the process of production justifies the use

of the label 'traditional'. I intend to explore how such textiles are being utilised by different ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam and, eventually, how they have become one of the important emblems symbolising Brunei national identity.

Traditional weavings are one of the many types of textiles that are used in the Malay Archipelago. In many of these archipelagic cultures, textiles play prominent roles in the lives of the society. In Brunei Darussalam, textiles have both functional and symbolic meanings. Functionally, they are worn for daily clothing and during ceremonial and festive occasions. Symbolically, they are also used as gifts and in exchange. Moreover, the use of textiles as decoration is also not uncommon.

In addition to the textiles made in Brunei Darussalam, others are imported from Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as Thailand. Cloths from China and India are also imported and frequently used. In fact, the Chinese, Indian and Indonesian influence is seen in the use of silk and gold threads, as well as certain weaving techniques and designs (Siti Zainon 1997). Although imported textiles from such countries have often been used in Brunei Darussalam, there are certain occasions in which locally woven traditional textiles are exclusively used.

### **The Notion of Tradition.**

The term 'tradition' may be understood to refer to 'an item or action inherited intact from the past, relatively invariant from generation to generation' (Dominguez 1986, in Seng and Wass 1995: 229). It suggests that reference is restricted to objects and actions which are bounded and unchanging, transmitted from past individuals to present individuals in an uninterrupted line. However, this may be a matter of subjective interpretation in the face of actual massive transformation.

The *Oxford Dictionary* (Tulloch 1997) gives various definitions of tradition. It includes custom, opinion, or belief handed down to posterity, especially orally or in practice. It is also defined as principles based on experience and practice or as theological doctrine or a particular doctrine claimed to have divine authority without documentary evidence. The *MacMillan*

*Dictionary of Anthropology* (Seymour-Smith 1986: 279-280, emphasis original) gives a wider definition of tradition:

In anthropology, the word is used instead for patterns of BELIEFS, CUSTOMS, VALUES, behaviour and knowledge or expertise which are passed on from generation to generation by the socialization process within a given population. The term has sometimes been used as a synonym for CULTURE itself, particularly in ETHNOLOGY, where the study of 'traditional everyday culture' or FOLK culture was the dominant concern.

In the Brunei context, the MacMillan definition of tradition appears to fit closely as the term has multiple Malay glosses, including *budaya* (culture), *adat istiadat* (customs), *adat resam* (norms), *falsafah* (worldviews and principles), *kesenian dan kesusasteraan* (aesthetic and literature) (Hashim 1999). In addition, it also includes law and regulations (*hukum adat*).

Edward Shils (1981) asserts that tradition is not rigid and unchanging, but rather, because it is a body of beliefs transmitted in some form by individuals through time, it has the capacity to be modified by means of innovation. Shils's interpretation of the concept of 'tradition' stresses its flexibility for incorporating change by noting that innovations can be conscious or unconscious, and that they can be minute and incremental or more novel and rapid. In this thesis, I argue that the concept of tradition should be used flexibly; tradition does not imply something that is static and unchanging. It involves a selective process, for as long as an object or action contains certain determined elements, it may still be considered as 'traditional'. In the context of the usage and production of textiles in Brunei Darussalam, flexibility of tradition is seen not only in modifications from internal innovation, but also in the tradition's ability to integrate influences and innovations from outside the culture (Causey 2003).

The notion of 'tradition' in this research, therefore, is not limited to old objects and practices inherited from the past. It also includes what Hobsbawm (1983) refers to as 'invented tradition', which encompasses all the rituals and objects that have been creatively inspired from the sense of tradition. Hobsbawm's (1983:1) broad definition of invented tradition includes 'both



“traditions” actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less traceable manner within a brief and datable period - a matter of a few years perhaps- and establishing themselves with great rapidity’. It is ‘taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm 1983:1). The past, in this sense, is used as ‘a model rather than a passively and unreflectively inherited legacy’ (Linnekin 1992:251). ‘Invented traditions’ may be problematic and misunderstood as ‘not genuine’ (Hanson 1991), but in the case of Brunei Darussalam, I borrow the term ‘invented tradition’ as a rhetorical or symbolic instrument used in the construction and reconstruction of culture in the present for contemporary purpose to reflect national identity.

Therefore, the notion of tradition that I am employing is loosely defined and not limited to the historic past; rather the old situations are used as a form of reference to establish a novel situation (Hobsbawm 1983). Such traditions may be deliberately constructed or created by certain members of the society. They may also be ‘responsive to contemporary priorities and agendas and politically instrumental’ (Linnekin 1992: 251). As a result, tradition is reinterpreted in the construction of cultural and national identity. At this point, the invention of tradition is closely linked to the discourse of nationalism whereby it can be seen as ‘political instrumentalisation’ (Babadzan 2000: 132) with precise social and political functions. By this, I mean that tradition is invented or constructed to meet various political, social and cultural challenges in the present. The state and dominant classes have constructed ceremonies and symbols that are linked to the nation and that are invoked in the shaping of the national identity. Thus, the invention of tradition is used partly as a legitimisation of political domination to idealise the representation of collective identities (Babadzan 2000) and to ensure the continuity of the production and consumption of the traditional woven textiles in the society.

I propose that the construction of new practices and objects, which may vary somewhat from the older ones, tends to remain within the boundaries of what is culturally acceptable (Bourdieu 1977). In order to have better understanding of cultural meanings and social actions, Bourdieu (1977) suggests that we are always constrained by what we have learned from our experiences, but our habitual responses rest on knowledge that is not formally learned from or cognitively represented as hard-and-fast rules. Our 'embodied' knowledge is less specific than rules that we have learned, and consists of general categorical relations that can be realised in different ways, depending on the context. This has enabled people to react flexibly to new contexts instead of repeating exact practices. This knowledge is what he calls

*habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representation which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them.... (Bourdieu 1977:72).

### **The Conceptual Entity of Tradition in Brunei Darussalam.**

Upon the proclamation of a 'Malay Islamic Monarchy' on Independence Day in 1984, Islam, Malayness, and monarchical values and virtues became the three foundations of the national ideology of the state of Brunei Darussalam. Although that philosophy was only proclaimed formally on Independence Day, it is generally accepted that Brunei Darussalam has been a 'Malay Islamic Sultanate' since the reign of the first recorded Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Muhammad Shah (1363-1402). The philosophy had been implicit in Bruneian thinking for a long time, and in the run-up to full independence was being formulated by those who saw a Brunei national identity as being defined by the attachment of its people to Malay culture, Islamic religion, and loyalty to the monarchy (Saunders 1994).

The declaration was seen as merely re-emphasising the notion as the national ideology and has since been rigorously adopted as the foundation of planning and implementation in all aspects of Bruneian life. Thus, the construction and reconstruction of traditions and identity in Brunei Darussalam are based on the tenets of the 'Malay Islamic Monarchy', which has also become the foundation underpinning social and cultural aspects of Brunei society. These values have constrained the generation and structuring of cultural and social practices and representations. Thus, the construction and reconstruction of traditions, including the consumption and production of traditional textiles, have been realised in accordance with that which constitutes Brunei culture.

In the context of Brunei Darussalam, 'Malay' is seen in many dimensions. It not only refers to *bangsa* (race), but Malay as the official language of Brunei Darussalam and the main mode of communicating collective cultural values and virtues, such as solidarity, loyalty and respect, which are considered as significant attributes of the Bruneian (Hashim 1999). The term also encompasses how Brunei social custom and law contribute to Brunei culture and identity.

Islam has been constitutionally declared the official religion of Brunei Darussalam and has become the core of Brunei identity. From Bruneians' Muslim perspective, Islam is not only a system of religious belief, but a comprehensive way of life, which also provides the principles of faith and practice that guide the people and government in Brunei Darussalam (Abd Latif 2003a:107) .

According to Abdul Latif (2003a: 107), the monarchical system is perceived by the people of Brunei Darussalam as a social contract between the ruler and his subject that has been legitimised through religious and cultural idioms. The social contract between the 'patron and client' (Abd Latif 2003a: 107) based on justice and loyalty – *Raja tak boleh zalim dan rakyat tak boleh derhaka* (the ruler must be just to his subjects while the people must never betray their ruler) – is embedded in the life style of Bruneian Malays. In Brunei Darussalam, the monarch is not a symbolic and ceremonial ruler, but he who

administers the government and the justice system according to Islam. According to Islam, the right to govern a country is a divine trust bestowed by Allah.

### **Textiles and Identity.**

In their book, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, Douglas and Isherwood (1979) argue for the need to see 'goods as an information system'; goods are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture. They stress that such an approach emphasises the double role of goods: providing subsistence and drawing lines of social relationships. In this thesis, I approach how textiles have been consumed according to cultural categories which respond to cultural logics (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Such textiles are being utilised in different spaces and rituals to show how society is structured around certain restrictions in order to maintain their value and enhance the rank of the people who have control of them.

The use of clothing or textiles to articulate and project identities is not new (Cerulo 1997). Following Bourdieu (1984), I suggest in Brunei Darussalam, textiles are used to distinguish social and political status. Types, patterns, designs, motifs and colours of textiles are used as markers of status. At the royal court, there are specific codes of conduct, and dress forms are prescribed in accordance with the status of the people in attendance. Only people of certain social and political affiliation are allowed to wear specific colours and designs of traditional woven textiles. Such codes of conduct and dress reflect the social and political structure of Brunei society.

Thus, through the differentiated and differentiating conditionings associated with the different conditions of existence, through the exclusions and inclusions, unions (marriages, affairs, alliances etc.) and divisions (incompatibilities, separations, struggles etc) which govern the social structure and the structuring forces it exerts, through all the hierarchies and classifications inscribed in objects (especially cultural products), in institutions (for example, the educational system) or simply in language, and through all the judgements, verdicts, gradings and warnings imposed by the institutions specially designed for this purpose,

such as the family or the educational system, or constantly arising from meetings and interactions of everyday life, the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds (Bourdieu 1984: 470-471).

### **The Process of Identification.**

In exploring the consumption of traditional textiles, it is necessary to consider the elements of identity in Brunei Darussalam: religion and ethnicity, social stratification, and social values and virtues. According to Abdul Latif (2001), the construction of social identity in Brunei Darussalam is governed by several characteristics, all of which are inter-related. First, social identity is influenced by religion. Islam is the official state religion although other faiths are allowed to be practised as well. The Muslims in Brunei Darussalam are mostly from the Brunei, Kedayan and Tutong ethnic groups, and the majority of the Belait have converted to Islam as well. Substantial numbers of Dusun and Bisaya have also converted to Islam, but a majority of them continue to practise traditional beliefs (pagan) while some of them have also converted to Christianity. The majority of Murut have become Christian, although there are also small numbers who have converted to Islam. Since Islam is the official religion of the state, its adherents are positioned at a higher status than followers of other religions. Adherence to Islam is one of the criteria to be the Sultan, and the Prime Minister in Brunei Darussalam must be a Sunni Muslim of the Shafie school of thought.

Religion as a system of ultimate beliefs and cosmologically grounded practices plays a great role in all cultures (Layton 1981). On the west coast of Borneo, Brunei was recorded as being one of the earliest centres of Islam in Southeast Asia (Maxwell 1990: 299), and Islamic teaching has had a great impact on the community. It has continued to exercise the strongest cultural influence; the strength of Islamic beliefs and the degree to which Islamic religious practices have absorbed older customs and traditions are clearly in evidence. I aim to demonstrate the integral part that religion plays in the production and consumption of textiles in the Brunei Darussalam context. In Brunei Darussalam,

the use of traditional cloths is closely linked to Islamic tradition. Most of the traditional textile weavers are Muslims. In addition, such textiles are mainly utilised by Muslims, although they are also consumed by non-Muslims. Geometrical and floral shapes, as well as environments have characterized traditional textile pattern and designs. Furthermore, plaids and striped designs are also widely used. As a later development, the uses of the Roman alphabet and Arabic calligraphy have been adopted exclusively for gifts and decorative items. The adaptation of animal and human figures is not common, especially among the Muslim weavers and designers, as Islamic teaching does not permit the employment of animal and human figures in the creation of its art. This indicates that Islamic teaching has had a significant impact upon the creators of the traditional textiles.

Not only has Islam exercised an influence upon the patterns and designs of traditional textiles, but it also affects the use of raw materials in the production. Most of the traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam are made of cotton as the major consumers of such textiles are men, and according to some currents of Islamic teaching men are not permitted to wear silk. Although the forbidding of men wearing silk is not stated in the Quran, it is elaborated in the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad. However, silk textiles may be produced for female consumers and for other purposes that do not involve clothing for men.

Islamic influences also have been a significant impact in ensuring the consumption of traditional textiles continues. Many rites commemorating significant life events, such as marriage, celebration for new mother and child birth, circumcision and puberty are required to be observed. Therefore, the continuing celebration of these ceremonies has been one of the important factors contributing to the contemporaneous consumption of traditional textiles in accordance with social custom.

The other element that is significant in the construction of identity in Brunei Darussalam is ethnicity. According to the Brunei Constitution, seven ethnic (*puak*) groups; Brunei, Belait, Bisaya, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut and Tutong, are classified into one category i.e. Malay. These groups are also known as *puak*

*jati* (genuine ethnic groups of Brunei Darussalam). However, among these, *puak Brunei* is the predominant ethnicity and has higher social as well as political status. The Sultan belongs to this group, as do most of the state's dignitaries, traditional and modern. While the other ethnic groups are politically peripheral, some members of these groups are conferred with titles by the Sultan and designated to be representatives of their ethnic group. Such conferral therefore grants them a higher status socially and politically.

Different kinds of textiles may indicate affiliation to certain ethnic groups, although it is not known whether this role is age-old or recent- the consequence of a nineteenth and twentieth century explosion of design possibilities associated with the availability of industrial yarn and dyestuff, and of modern political strategies to manipulate ethnicity (Fox, pers comm. in Schneider 1987: 413). The production of traditional textiles is predominantly the work of women from the *puak* Brunei. Although other Malay ethnic groups also consume traditional textiles, their use of these cloths is not as prominent as it is among the *puak* Brunei. Styles of clothing and different ways of using such textiles may distinguish ethnicity in Brunei Darussalam. However, in this thesis I focus on how Bruneian traditional woven textiles have penetrated into other ethnic groups in Brunei and how such textiles are being utilised by them. Such use is not only for practical purposes, but also to express a sense of belonging to Brunei culture as a whole.

Social identity is also constructed through social stratification and status. Social stratification and status can be expressed, and are especially manifested in royal customs, such as the system of titles conferment, clothing, royal gifts and regalia, as well as the seating arrangement in the royal court. Social stratification in Brunei Darussalam can be seen in the form of a pyramid with the Sultan positioned at the top followed by high ranking nobles. High ranking non-noble officials and their descendents make up the middle ranks followed by low ranking non-noble officials, including non-Muslim Malay representatives of their local communities. The lowest rank is the commoner stratum comprising ordinary citizens and residents of Brunei Darussalam. Weaving skill was linked

to women of high non-noble status (Zaini 1960, in Brown 1978:58). Furthermore, the privilege of wearing traditional cloths at certain occasions was granted only to members of the higher social classes.

Education has provided an avenue for social mobility in recent years, especially among the commoners. Education has thus become one of the elements in status construction. Knowledgeable and well-educated people are not only respected, but usually also have high positions within the society, such as in government administration and in the traditional and modern political system. Holding high position in either the traditional or modern political systems also grants officials the right to be invited to certain functions, such as the royal court functions; there they are privileged to wear ceremonial dress of traditional cloths signifying their position in the hierarchy.

The representation of social status is objectified through the act of consumption of traditional woven textiles. Traditional textiles have also been adopted and assimilated as parts of the ceremonial dress at state functions and in the royal court they have become part of the 'official attire'. The textiles' patterns and colours are important in the codes of dress in royal court ceremonies. Motifs and colours indicate status and political allegiance. They show ceremonial and political importance and there are rights to wear particular patterns and colours. Conformity to the customary dress code shows homage, and it follows that disrespect for these codes is seen either as ignorance, or at worst, an act of rebellion.

In a complexly organised society, there is a need to express political legitimacy in a symbolic form (Geertz 1983). Such expression justifies the existence of the governing elite and orders their actions in terms of ceremonies, insignia, formalities and appurtenances that may be inherited or even invented (Geertz 1983). The ideas of sovereignty and power in Brunei Darussalam are embodied and symbolised in the Sultan's body (Lomnitz 2001). The Sultan's freedom to select and wear clothes of his own choosing indicates that he has supreme power and expresses his sovereignty. He stands not only at the top of hierarchy, but also outside the system, which confirms his position 'above the



law'. In addition, the employment of traditional woven textiles as a ceremonial dress and part of regalia in the royal court, especially among dignitaries, plays an important role in emphasising the tangible expression of status and power.

Bruneian identity is not limited to religious, ethnic, social, political and educational status. It also includes *nilai jatidiri* or the 'essence of character', a model of ethno-personality grounded in values and virtues which are drawn from a notion of culture based on wisdom and knowledge (Wan Zawawi 2003). Such character traits include loyalty, unity, cooperation and solidarity, courtesy, politeness, honour and respectfulness. This notion of a Malay 'essence of character' has been perceived as a significant attribute of Brunei society (Hashim 1999).

### **Textiles and Nationalism.**

According to Anderson (1991), the concept of nationalism is central to change of perception of togetherness within a nation, which is unified usually by a common history, a shared geography or national territory, a common culture, common religion or common language. He suggests that a nation is 'an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 1991: 6). He also asserts that it is 'imagined' because although the members of the nation will under no circumstances be acquainted with all other members of the society, the image of their communion lives in their minds (Anderson 1991:6). Therefore, he proposes to treat nationalism as form of national 'kinship' which is similar to a state-centred philosophy that has as its goal the construction, or defence, of something as sacred as the nation state (Anderson 1991:5).

In Brunei Darussalam, the requirement for the expression of a nation-state's identity is not simply cognitive, but there is a need to manifest it, such as through the consumption and usage of traditional textiles to express political sovereignty (Myers 2001a). Textiles are adopted as a vehicle to articulate the construction of culture and have become a means of achieving widespread interest and acclaim (Morrell 1997).

Exhibition of textiles plays an important role, as it not only acts as a medium of representation, but also as a form of cultural production. What is collected, selected and exhibited constructs a framework for the representation of people, their culture and their history (Myers 2001a). This was one of the objectives of the establishment of the Malay Technology Museum. This museum exhibits traditional technology, including traditional woven textiles and weaving implements, to provide members of the public the manifestation of identity and to sustain cultural heritage through material culture. In addition, traditional cloths are also increasingly displayed in government and private buildings and formulated as central to the distinctive Bruneian national imaginary. Thus, the support given by both government and private sectors in adopting traditional textiles represents their recognition of such textiles and associates them with the formation of Bruneian national identity.

Textiles in Brunei Darussalam have long been commoditised. Consumption of textiles provides one of the ways in which consumers reflect their economic stability and social status. I examine how such commodities are used to objectify social wealth by focusing on how consumption is conceptualized to construct such an image. The ability of the consumers to attain possession of the traditional textiles may not only display their social status, but also economic stability.

Commercialisation of traditional textiles has also been one way in which economic development has been enhanced in Brunei Darussalam, while also preserving cultural heritage. Both processes have been recognised as part of the political discourse towards economic rationalisation and cultural formation (Myers 2001a). Therefore, the commercialisation of traditional cloth has been strongly supported by the state. Weavers have been encouraged to be entrepreneurial and to promote the sales of their textiles in nationally organised exhibitions, as well as participate in trade expositions at an international level. Besides its economic orientation, such state support is also inspired by national construction efforts to represent traditional textiles as part of Brunei national culture.

### **Transformation and Continuity.**

According to Hashim (1999), maintaining tradition is perceived to be crucial within Brunei society, as it forms the foundation of the civilisation of the Brunei nation as a whole. The tradition constitutes worldviews, law and regulation, practices and objects that shape Brunei culture; decadence in cultural values has been perceived as rooted in the negligence of the members of society in upholding such tradition. However, it is not a surprising matter in anthropology that tradition is not static (Forshee 2001). For the Bruneian, it is important to maintain tradition, but this does not deny change.

In Brunei Darussalam, practices and objects have been innovated and recreated in ways that accommodate change, yet remain culturally appropriate and within the boundaries of general principles. Ceremonial practice is an arena of considerable innovation (Morrell 1997:359). Traditional textiles have been produced and consumed for ceremonial activities. For instance, other than the employment of such textiles at the rites of passage ceremonies celebrating life cycle transitions of individual, the usage of textiles is now recreated in other ceremonies constructed to mark individual or group achievement at the national level, such as the graduation ceremonies of academic institutions and Teachers' Day.

The transformation of the social and political system has also provided continual production and consumption of traditional textiles. Such textiles have always been significant as markers of status and rank in the social and political system. However, the transformation of the system has intensified the consumption of the textiles as they have now been extended not only to mark status or rank, but to distinguish different departments in the government and in private institutions too.

The notion of nationalism among Bruneians has also been an important aspect that contributes to the continuity of traditional textiles. Traditional textiles have always been accepted as one of the symbols of identity. Therefore, traditional textiles have been consumed as one way for Bruneians to preserve their

heritage. The consumption of such textiles has increased especially in the 'post-colonial' era as a reaffirmation of national identity. As a result, traditional textiles have been ubiquitously consumed at individual, national and international levels as a symbol of identity.

### **Methodology and Personal Position.**

I was born and raised in the capital city of Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Brunei<sup>1</sup>. My parents are from *puak* Brunei of commoner families; however, my father is adopted by a noble family. I come from a big family with seven brothers and two sisters. Five of them are already married. I grew up in a surrounding where rites of passage are celebrated. When I was twelve years old, I underwent a puberty ceremony. I finished reading the whole Quran at the age of nineteen, and a ceremony marking the end of reading the Quran (*khatam Al-Quran*) for my siblings and I was held. When I was younger; I frequently asked to be bridesmaid at my relatives' and neighbours' weddings.

Apart from rites held for me, my other siblings also had to undergo rites to mark transitions in their lives, including circumcision, marriage and first born child. These ceremonies involved my active participation as part of the family. In addition to this, I have also been involved in other ceremonies held by other people, either as part of the hosting family members<sup>2</sup> or as guest. When I was younger, my parents used to bring me along to attend ceremonial functions of life cycle celebrations, especially those hosted by close relatives. As I grew older and formed my own circle of friends and acquaintances, I also frequently got invitations to attend ceremonial functions, such as weddings and celebration of new mother and first born either for themselves or immediate members of their family. When I started working, I also got invited to certain formal functions which were held by the institution I was working with, as well as at state level. Many of the important royal court and state functions are usually transmitted live on air by national broadcasting, the Radio and Television Brunei. When I was not invited to these functions and if I had the chance, I always found myself watching the live broadcast. In addition, I also liked to keep myself updated by watching

the national news. At many of these ceremonies, traditional woven cloths are ubiquitously used. My participation at these events has given me reasonable knowledge about the use of traditional textiles in Brunei's traditions. Therefore, this research to some extent is drawn and backgrounded by my 'experiences and memories' (Pudarno 2002:29).

When I did my MA at Durham University, I chose to write on locally woven traditional cloths for my dissertation, focussing on the technical process of the production (Siti Norkhalbi 1999). Knowing that there was a lack of research on the topic, I decided for my PhD thesis to widen my scope by looking at the relationships between traditional textiles and Bruneian society. It is also a requirement for me as government sponsored 'officer' to do research on Brunei related issues. Furthermore, the central objective of the establishment of the faculty in which I work at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, i.e. the Academy of Brunei Studies, is to activate research on all aspects of life in Brunei Darussalam (Abdul Latif 2003a:214).

#### Fieldwork.

For anthropologists, fieldwork is the fundamental activity that underlies the advancement of anthropological knowledge. Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 12-13) distinguish between 'the field' and 'home' in their spatial separation. For them, 'the field' is where data are collected, whereas 'home' is where the data are analysed and the ethnography is written up. In my case, 'the field' is also home, although the process of writing up was conducted 'away' from home as well as the field. Jackson (in Morton 1999:254) suggests that one of the reasons there is increasing interest in anthropology at home is the awareness of ignorance about conditions "at home". When I approached my informants to ask for their permission either to do my participant observation or to interview them, they were very glad to know that there was *kesedaran* (awareness) among *orang kitani* (our own people) and interest in studying our own culture. They were very hospitable and co-operative. Conducting research at home to some extent is advantageous for me as I did not need to learn a new language. All my informants communicated with me in Brunei Malay dialect (lingua franca in Brunei

Darussalam) and this gave me relative ease of entering into my own society (Morton 1999).

In his article *Anthropology at Home in Australia*, Morton (1999: 243) suggests that the phase 'anthropology at home' could give different meanings, but it is intended to express the idea of anthropologists coming to study groups or sub-groups that are in some sense to be regarded as their own. While I am studying groups of people that I am part of collectively, I could argue that I consider myself 'other', as I am not very familiar with the culture of ethnic groups other than *puak* Brunei. Although I have acquaintances from members of other Malay groups in Brunei Darussalam from my school days as well as working life<sup>3</sup>, I am rarely invited to functions held by them. In addition, I am also researching into different social groups and status to mine. Therefore, I consider my research not only as a process to study the familiar and dominant culture, but also to research that which is unknown to me (Madden 1999).

The fieldwork on which this study is based was conducted in six phases. The first phase was from December 2001 until March 2002. The second phase was from June to September 2002. This was followed by a shorter period from January to March 2003. Another two rounds of data gathering were carried out in October 2003 and from February until mid March 2004. The last phase was carried out in September 2004. These times were purposely planned to coincide with major national events, such as the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday celebration, the National Day anniversary and the royal wedding, at all of which textiles were prominently used.

Most of the data collected during my fieldwork involved participant observation and interviews. Participation observation is one of the only ways of getting close to the subjects, allowing the researcher not only to observe what people do, but also to query their motivations and beliefs (Gans 1999:540). As a member of the society being studied, I used my insider position to establish rapport with the subjects in the research settings. At national events, I usually applied for permission to the organising institution via the Director<sup>4</sup> of the Academy of Brunei Studies. It is usual practice for researchers to get permission

as this will provide better access to the site. While in Perth, I applied for permission to conduct research in Brunei Darussalam via my Head of School at The University of Western Australia, who also happened to be my supervisor, but introducing myself as a Bruneian officer pursuing PhD research. Private events which I observed were hosted by my own relatives and friends, as well as relatives of my friends. When I was 'home', relatives and friends who were aware of my research were always willing to inform me of ceremonies they would be hosting. I also used this information to ask for their permission to conduct my participant observation research.

While my trips 'home' were intended to correspond with certain state events, such as National Day anniversary, Teachers' Day, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday and convocation ceremony of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, I also concurrently did participant observation at other events where traditional textiles were utilised. While I was 'in the field', I attended several weddings ceremonies<sup>5</sup>, two of which I was able to observe most events of the wedding. One of them was a marriage between Abdul Aziz and Rosita, both from *puak* Brunei, which was held in June 2002 and the other one was the recent royal wedding between the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and Dayangku Sarah binti Pengiran Ab Rahman<sup>6</sup> held in September 2004. During the wedding between Abdul Aziz and Rosita, a circumcision ceremony was also concurrently held for Abdul Aziz's niece and this provided me the chance to observe the use of traditional textile at that occasion. I also had the opportunity to observe a wedding reception of Abdul Hadi, from *puak* Dusun, who was marrying a *puak* Brunei bride, Meslianawati, in July 2002. This particular marriage was useful to me to observe the use of traditional textile in *puak* Dusun and this was the first time for me to attend a wedding ceremony hosted by *puak* Dusun. In July 2002, I also observed a *majlis menghantar tanda betunang* (ceremony to mark the engagement)<sup>7</sup> between Hajah Aziha and Sharol Adnani which was held at the future bride's family house.

For *mandi berlawat* (celebration for new mother and first-born child) ceremony<sup>8</sup>, I attended two ceremonies hosted by my relatives, one held in

February 2002 and the other in August 2002. A puberty ceremony<sup>9</sup> was simultaneously held for three of my female relatives during their sister-in-law's *mandi berlawat* ceremony in February 2002. I had two of my uncles pass away during my fieldwork, one of them died in August 2002 and the other in February 2003. I was able to observe the use of textiles during their funerals.

I also visited government buildings and offices, museums and other places of interest to my research and do my observation. During my visits to these places, often I was given a tour by the official in-charge. With their approval, I also took the opportunity to take photographs.

It is important to maintain the participant observer method in anthropology, but there is also the need to combine it with other methods, including interviews (Morton 1999:251). Interviewing is important in this research for various reasons. First, it enabled me to collect data of events that I was not able to observe personally. Second, it provided me with the possibility of discovering data that I am not aware of. Third, it helped me to clarify the meaning of certain actions and use of traditional textiles at different situations according to the interviewees' perspectives and interpretations. Fourth, the data I acquired from the interviews confirmed my earlier interpretations drawn through my observation and analysis. The interview method thus provided me with a large amount of data that shaped the analysis of this thesis.

Interviews were semi-structured, remaining open-ended and were flexible in nature. All interviews, where consent was given, were taped and transcribed word for word. The transcription is especially important in that it 'preserves the data in a more permanent, retrievable, examinable and flexible manner' (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999:80). In addition, the process of doing transcription promotes intense familiarity with the data (Lapadat 2000: 204).

I chose most of my informants. Several aspects were taken into account in choosing informants, such as their position, social status, ethnic group and familiarity with Brunei tradition and weaving activities. Informants from relevant institutions were suggested by colleagues and identified according to their occupations. Furthermore, frequent users or consumers of traditional textiles were



also interviewed. My informants were from different social groups and ethnic backgrounds.

Use of internet and communication technology has also been a significant research tool. While in Perth, I kept myself informed of activities in Brunei Darussalam through on-line news from Brunei Darussalam's websites, such as *Brudirect* (<http://brudirect.com>), *Borneo Bulletin* (<http://www.brunet.bn/news/bb>), *Radio Television Brunei* (<http://www.rtb.gov.bn>) and *Pelita Brunei* (<http://www.brunet.bn/news/pelita>), on the internet. These 'public sphere data' (Silverman 2000:120) have made up a significant portion of the data I collected. In addition, I keep regular contact with my family, friends, acquaintances and some informants through telephone, e-mail and on-line chatting. They have been very helpful in assisting me gather data.

Visual data have also played a role in this research. I took photographs not only as part of the data, but more significantly to illustrate the findings in this thesis. I used photographs in interviews to draw out responses from my informants. Photographs helped establish rapport with my informants and I also used them as a reward (Collier 1967). Video recordings were also used to obtain data. These recordings are mostly live recordings of certain events and have been especially useful when analysing events I was not able to observe personally. The film record is a semi-permanent source of data which is an invaluable aid as an instrument of observation and description, as it can be analysed at any time (Collier 1967).

I used a multi-sited approach in this research. The difference of social classes, as well as the distribution of the population of different ethnic groups around the state is significant in order to venture into the usage patterns and significance of traditional textiles among them. This is particularly useful to this research in order to follow the consumption and changing significance of traditional textiles throughout the community. Such an approach allows a detailed understanding of how traditional textiles are being consumed and what they mean in different contexts and usages and in their performative associations (Tilley

1999). The life of objects is varied and multifunctional, possessing the ability to respond to different situations (Morrell 1997).

### **Organisation of the Thesis.**

This thesis consists of nine chapters. In this introductory chapter I have provided an understanding of the conceptual elements in this thesis. I clarify key words, such as the notion of tradition, the conceptual entity of tradition in Brunei Darussalam and the process of identification. This overview of concepts provides basic information on approaches in this thesis. I also discuss my research methodology.

Chapter two provides an overview of the location of the study. This chapter provides background information on the physical and historical features, social organisation and ethnic composition of Brunei Darussalam. The systems of belief and politics are also presented to indicate their relation to this study as a whole.

Chapter three examines the clothing worn by the Malay population in Brunei Darussalam. It provides background information about styles and modes of clothing and how such styles and modes manifest identity. I particularly focus on the processes of globalisation and Islamization which have influenced the evolution and transformation of clothing in Brunei Darussalam, and thus exert an impact on the formation of Bruneian identity.

Chapter four describes the different types, patterns and designs of traditional woven cloths. The source and symbolism of the motifs used in decorating the cloths, as well as factors contributing to innovation in the creation and recreation of designs and reproduction of traditional textiles, are also treated in this chapter.

Chapter five examines the utilisation of traditional textiles in the rites of passage ceremonies commemorating the life cycle. The discussion focuses on ceremonies commemorating marriage, the celebration of a new mother and her first-born child, circumcision, puberty, and funeral rites. The predominant role of Islamic teachings in relation to such rites is explained. In addition, the influence

of imported or foreign textiles and their adaptation into Brunei culture is also examined in this chapter.

Chapter six focuses on the consumption and display of traditional textiles in the royal court ceremonies. Such textiles are used as ceremonial dress and part of the regalia. The signification of traditional textiles as markers of office and rank, metaphors of power and authority, symbols of continuity and succession, as well as representations of obedience and loyalty, are also considered in this chapter.

Chapter seven explores the utilisation of traditional textiles as a symbol of national identity. The role of government institutions in propagating the invention of traditions as a vehicle to revive or stimulate national culture is examined. This chapter discusses how the invention of tradition is being manipulated in the discourse of nationalism and the construction of identity.

Chapter eight explores the role of exhibition and display, as well as commercialisation as a medium for redefining cultural and national identity. Traditional textiles have been persistently adapted and strategically demonstrated by certain institutions connected with the distribution and utilisation of cultural resources in the reconstruction of national identity. The commercialisation of traditional textiles is not only seen as a process of economic enhancement, but also as cultural preservation. The role of certain government and private institutions is explored in this chapter.

Chapter nine, the concluding chapter, reflects on how tradition has been used to evoke a distinctive Brunei national identity. Traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam have multiple roles whose meanings vary according to the situations in which they are utilised. They are used as ceremonial dress, furnishing and decoration. Furthermore, such textiles are also exchanged, for example as wedding prestations, gifts and souvenirs, as well as being commercialised. They are also exhibited in museums and displayed in government and private institutions. This chapter recapitulates theoretical issues concerning the conceptualisation of textiles and the uses to which they are put in the project of nationalisation, as well as in the construction of a unique Brunei identity.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> On 4 October 1970, Bandar Brunei was renamed Bandar Seri Begawan.

<sup>2</sup> In Brunei Darussalam, other than immediate family members (own family), close relatives, such as uncle, aunt and cousins from both parents are also considered as members of the family. When these relatives hold functions, e.g. wedding, other close relatives are also considered as co-hosts, and thus are obliged to be actively involved during such functions. Contemporarily, it is usual practice for the head of family's name of close relatives to be mentioned in the invitation card to indicate that they are considered as co-hosting the ceremony.

<sup>3</sup> Other than getting acquaintance with colleagues, my work has also provides me the opportunity to meet other ethnic groups when I accompany students for their fieldtrips. Simultaneously, I took the chance in these trips to gather data which gave me a preliminary conception relating to this research.

<sup>4</sup> This is equivalent to Dean of Faculty.

<sup>5</sup> Malay wedding ceremony in Brunei Darussalam consists of series of events (further discussed in chapter five). While I was home for my fieldwork, I was also invited to a few wedding ceremonies hosted by relatives and friends, in which I only had the opportunity to attend one event at each invitation. My attendance at these invitations varied according to my availability due to work commitments as well as the nature of invitation. Only family members and close friends are usually invited to all events of a marriage ceremony, while other guests are usually invited on wedding reception and powdering night ceremony. There were times I attended the night powdering events (*Majlis Berbedak Malam*), others at the wedding receptions (*Majlis Bersanding*).

<sup>6</sup> She is now officially known as Her Royal Highness Pengiran Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah binti Pengiran Ab Rahman.

<sup>7</sup> Further discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup> Further discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> Further discussed in chapter 5.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Locating the Scene: Brunei Darussalam in Brief.**

#### **Introduction.**

The social and political organisation of Brunei society provided avenues for the uses of traditional textiles in the construction of identity. Their use as part of ceremonial costume and regalia, especially in the royal court, indicates the status of the wearers and holders. In addition, textiles are also used as a vehicle to manifest cultural and national identity. The historical trajectories provide the background of how traditions in Brunei Darussalam were structured. Early influences, including those of Hindu-Buddhism, Islam and the West, have had substantial impacts on the construction of traditions in Brunei Darussalam.

This chapter provides an overview of Brunei Darussalam including its physical features and historical trajectory, social organisation, and systems of belief. The political system, institutional structure of religion, and ethnic composition are also laid out to indicate their relation to this study as a whole. This chapter is significant as a background to textile traditions in Brunei society.

#### **Physical Features.**

Situated on the northwest coast of Borneo, Brunei Darussalam is one of the oldest monarchies in Asia. The South China Sea bounds it on the north and the Malaysian State of Sarawak on all other sides, separating Brunei Darussalam into two parts. The total area of Brunei Darussalam is 5,765 square kilometres, and eighty percent of the land area is covered with tropical rainforest. It has an equatorial climate, characterised by constant high temperatures and high levels of humidity and rainfall.

Brunei Darussalam is divided into four administrative districts: Brunei Muara, Tutong, Belait and Temburong. Brunei Muara district encompasses the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, and houses the majority of the population. Tutong is mainly agricultural, while Belait, encompasses the oil towns of Kuala Belait and Seria, and has the second-largest concentration of population. Temburong is

situated in the eastern part of the country, covering a large area of hilly land, heavily jungled and sparsely populated, with a small town at Bangar.



Map 1: Map of Brunei Darussalam.

(Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/southeastasia/brunei/brunei.htm>, accessed Jan 3, 2005)

Based on the Central Intelligence Agency's publication, *The World Fact Book* (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bx.html>, accessed April 15, 2004), in July 2003, Brunei Darussalam had an estimated population of 358,098 people, consisting of 187,343 males and 170,755 females. The majority of the population, 67%, is Malay. Other indigenous groups, including Iban, Punan and Kelabit make up 6% of the population. The Chinese comprise 15% and the remaining 12% are of unspecified ethnicity. All citizens are generally known as *orang Brunei* (Brunei people).

### Official Language.

Bahasa Melayu or Malay is the official language, although Brunei Malay (a local dialectal variant of Bahasa Melayu) is commonly used as a lingua franca. English is however, recognised as the second most important language and is used

particularly in business and education. Among the Chinese inhabitants, Hokkien is most widely spoken, but Mandarin remains the accepted medium of instruction in Chinese (Borneo Bulletin Brunei Yearbook 2001: 23). In addition, native languages are also spoken.

### **Economy.**

The Brunei Darussalam economy is oil-based as oil and gas are the State's major exports and the government uses its earnings in part to build up its foreign reserves. Brunei Darussalam is the third-largest oil producer in Southeast Asia and the fourth-largest producer of liquefied natural gas in the world. However, there have been steps to diversify the economy beyond oil and gas. Brunei's non-petroleum industries include agriculture, forestry, fishing and banking. Future plans also include upgrading the labour force and strengthening the tourist sectors. In 1999, the government was estimated to employ 48% of the labour force; production linked to the oil, natural gas industries, services and construction made up 42% and agriculture, forestry and fishing 10% (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bx.html>, accessed April 15, 2004)

### **Historical Trajectories.**

The early history of Brunei is blurred by the absence of continuous and properly documented chronology (Abd Latif 2003a), making it quite difficult to construct Brunei's history. Such a problem was admitted by Donald Brown, an American anthropologist, who did his doctoral research on Brunei in the late 1960's. Brown noted (1970:viii):

The main problem confronting a person undertaking the task of writing a history of Brunei would be an achievement of good understanding of Brunei's present and past institutions. While the past institutions conform in many cases to patterns broadly discernible in Southeast Asia, there is much that is unique to Brunei. No full understanding of these institutions would be likely to develop from consultation of the written sources alone.

According to Abd Latif (2003a: 155-169), the local view of the history of Brunei is expressed in the *hikayat* or historical legends which reflect the cultural unity of the Malay region. *Syaer Awang Semaun* is the only local source of documentation of the early founding and origin of the present Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam. The *Syaer Awang Semaun* is an epic story that includes local folktales, myths and legends of Brunei warriors, as well as historical literature. The Malaysian scholar, Prof. Datuk Hajah Siti Hawa (1994) comments that the *Syaer Awang Semaun* is a significant document not only from the perspective of Brunei Darussalam's history, language and literature, but also of its civilisation. It is difficult, however, to assess the *syaer*'s accuracy and therefore the extent to which it can be used to reconstruct the history of Brunei Darussalam.

The earliest mention of Brunei is in Chinese records in the sixth century. The Chinese referred to Brunei as Poli, Puni, Bruni, Wen-lai, and Bun-lai (Mohd Jamil 1993). The difference may have been due to the changes of the ruling dynasties in China; and therefore, the pronunciation varied in accordance with the dialect being used (Mohd Jamil 2000). It was recorded that in the years AD 518, 523 and 616, and in 669 the King of Puni or Poli sent tribute and representatives to China to strengthen the ties between the two nations. At that time, ancient Brunei might have been under the influence of the Sriwijaya Empire (Mohd Jamil 2000:5). Another envoy was sent with tributes to the court of China in 977 AD, followed by three more missions in 1370, 1405 and 1425 (Bantong 1993).

In 1225, Chau Ju-Kua, the controller of customs at the port of Ch'uan-chou in Fukien Province, describes Poni as the most important port in the Eastern Ocean which then comprised the Moluccas, Sulu, north Borneo and south to Java. He also reported it as having the region's most highly developed government, which strictly controlled trade over a large area. He added that it was also significant as the main source of the very best camphor (Leake 1990: 6). In his account, he noted:

In this country, the city walls are made of wooden boards and the city contains over ten thousand inhabitants. Under its control there are



fourteen districts (or cities). The King's residence is covered with *pei-to* (palm) leaves; the dwellings of the people with grass. The king's mode of dressing is more or less that of the Chinese. When he does not wear clothes and goes barefooted, his upper arm is encircled with a golden ring; his wrist with a golden silk band and his body is wrapped in a piece of cotton cloth. He sits on a string bedstead (charpoy). When he goes out, they spread out a large piece of cloth unlined on which he sits; a number of men bear it aloft; they call this a *juanang*. He is followed by over five hundred men, those in front carrying single and double edge(s) swords and other weapons, those behind golden dishes filled with camphor and betel nuts. He has for his protection over a hundred fighting boats, and when they have an engagement, they carry swords and wear armour...Their household vessels are often made of gold... They use the floss of the *ki-pei* [cotton] plant to make cloth...The wives and daughters in rich families wear sarongs of fancy brocades, and of melted gold coloured silk. As marriage presents they first give wine, then betel-nuts, then a finger ring, and after this a gift of cotton cloth or a sum of gold or silver, to complete the marriage rite. (Hirth and Rockhill 1966: 155).

The earliest European records of Brunei were written by Ludovico Varthema in 1505, Tome Pires in 1515 and Lorenzo de Gomez in 1518 (Iik Ariffin 1996). However, their description was not as extensive as Magellan's chronicler, Antonia Pigaffeta, who visited Brunei in 1521. He wrote:

That city [is] entirely built in salt water, except the houses of the King and certain chiefs. It contains twenty-five thousand fires (i.e. families). The houses are all constructed of wood and built up from the ground on tall pillars. When the tide is high the women go in boats through the settlement selling the articles necessary to maintain life. (Brown 1974).

In the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was possible that Bruneians practised a Hindu-Buddhist system of governing under the subjugation of the Majapahit Empire located in Java (Hashim 2003: 31). Brunei at the time sent tribute to this Javanese Hindu-Buddhist Empire so as to indicate its dependence. An archaeological discovery in Kota Batu of Hindu-Buddhist royal regalia was

believed to be the remains of the Majapahit Empire (Mohd Yusop 2003). However, in early 15<sup>th</sup> century, Majapahit's power began to wane, and in 1408 Brunei gained its independence. Although Brunei was freed from Majapahit, the influences of Javanese Hindu-Buddhism had strongly incorporated into the culture and are still evident in the contemporary Brunei Darussalam, especially social customs and the traditional political system.

The coming of Islam did exert a major impact upon Bruneian tradition and culture. Islam came to Brunei in the tenth century, as evidenced by Muslim envoys being sent to China as the representatives of the non-Muslim ruler of Brunei (Abd Latif 2003a:147). However, it was only at the end of 1360's that Islam was officially accepted. At that time, the first recorded ruler of Brunei, Awang Alak Betatar converted to Islam and changed his name to Muhammad Shah. Since then, Brunei Darussalam has been an Islamic Sultanate.

Islam grew in strength in Brunei Darussalam during the reign of the third sultan, Sultan Sharif Ali (1426-1432). He was an Arab from Taif who came to Brunei to spread the teaching of Islam. He was also believed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, through the lineage of one of the Prophet's grandsons, Sayidina Hassan. Sharif Ali then married Princess Ratna Kesuma, the daughter of the second sultan of Brunei, Sultan Ahmad. Sultan Ahmad did not have any son as his heir, therefore, when he died, the people of Brunei put his son-in-law, Sharif Ali, on the throne. During his reign, the practice of Islam grew, mosques were built and *syariah* (Islamic) law was enforced (Abd. Latif 2003a:149). Islamic faith was at its peak during the reign of Sultan Bolkiah, the fifth Sultan of Brunei (1473-1521). Concurrent with the expansion of the Brunei Empire during this golden era was also the propagation of Islam across the northern part of the Island of Borneo and as far as Mindanao, in the Philippines.

In the 1578, during the reign of Sultan Saiful Rijal (1533-1581), the Islamic religion in Brunei faced a great challenge when Spanish forces, led by Francisco de Sande, captain general of the force in Manila, attacked and captured Brunei. Prior to the battle, de Sande sent a provocative letter to the Sultan of Brunei and demanded that Christian preachers be allowed in Brunei while Islamic

preachers were to be restrained from propagating Islam in the Philippines. However, the Spaniard incursion into Brunei lasted for only 72 days (Sanib 1994:135). The Bruneian troops poisoned the drinking water which made most of the Spanish soldiers very sick and forced them to return to Manila. They never attempted to recapture Brunei. The failure of the Spanish to occupy Brunei has helped to perpetuate the dominance of the Islamic religion in Brunei Darussalam.

From the end of the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, Brunei lost its grip on its empire due to Western political interest in Borneo (Abd Latif 2001: 151). In 1839 James Brooke arrived in Sarawak; at the same time, a revolt against the Brunei viceroy was under way (Bantong 1993). Brooke offered his services to suppress the revolt and succeeded in doing so (Abdul Karim 1994). In return, he coerced the reigning sultan, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien II (1828-1852), to confirm his appointment as the governor and Rajah of Sarawak in 1842 (Saunders 1994). Brooke's dominating authority was matched by Brunei's decline. Not only was the Sultan obliged to hand over Sarawak to Brooke, but also, in 1846, in an effort to combat seafaring pirates and protect commercial law, the Island of Labuan in northern Borneo was handed over to the British, who were also given preferential commercial rights (Gunn 1997). In 1888, in order to prevent Brunei from losing more of its territories, the Sultan signed a treaty with the British, by which Brunei became a British Protectorate.

The treaty put Brunei at a disadvantageous position because the British Government had the right to privilege British subjects so that they enjoyed similar benefits given to subjects of the state of Brunei (Sanib 1994). This led to further disruption of Brunei's unity. An unfortunate legacy down to the present day was the forcible occupation of Limbang by Charles Brooke in 1890 (Gunn 1997). The partitioning of Brunei commenced in 1840 and ended in 1905-06 with an agreement to establish a British Resident in Brunei, matched by cartographic representations of the new boundaries that divided the Sarawak of the Brooke dynasty from the Brunei Sultanate (Gunn 1997). By 1906, Brunei had shrunk to a small sultanate surrounded by Sarawak and the South China Sea.

### **Ethnic Composition in Brunei Darussalam.**

Brunei Darussalam is an ethnically plural society (King 2001). According to Marryat's report in 1848 (Bantong 1993), Brunei town was a place where hundreds of prahus (boats) belonging to the natives of every tribe, including Dusun, Malay, Dayaks and Murut could be found. The 1911 Brunei Annual Report recorded that over half of the population were Brunei Malays and a further quarter Kedayan and various minority groups, such as Tutong, Orang Bukit (Bisaya), Belait, Murut and Dusun. There were also several hundred Chinese (Bantong 1993). Furthermore, they were also Indians and Europeans. Today, more foreigners are staying in Brunei Darussalam. Most of them come from other countries in the Southeast Asian region, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Malaysia, looking for employment, either as skilled or unskilled labour.

According to King (2001) the Brunei Malays originated from an ethnic group that can be traced back to the pagan aboriginal populations of the Brunei Bay region. Other ethnic groups, such as the Bisaya and Dusun, refer to the Brunei Malay as *Sang Abai* (Brunei ethnic) (Bantong 1993). A number of times during my interviews with my Bisaya and Dusun informants I found them referring to the Brunei in that way.

The second most populous indigenous group after the Brunei Malays is the Kedayan. They are believed to be of Javanese origin (McArthur 1987: 112). This ethnic group is closely associated with the Brunei Malay, as they follow the same religion and speak variant dialects of the same language. They also share a great many customs and appear to be of a similar physical stock. However, traditionally, the two had distinctive differences in occupation. The Kedayan were rice farmers of the coastal plains and low land.

Other ethnic groups that are considered Malay in accordance with the Brunei Constitution are the Bisaya and the Dusun. Despite being considered two different ethnicities in the Constitution, the Bisaya and the Dusun have cultural and linguistic similarities (Bantong 1993; Yabit 1990; Kathi 1984). However, the term Bisaya is used to describe those who settled in the border areas near

Limbang and the Dusun are the people who settled along the banks of the Belait and Tutong rivers (Bantong 1993; Yabit 1990).

The Murut are the inhabitants of the Temburong district. Traditionally, they were chiefly involved in collecting jungle produce, which was traded with Chinese, Bisaya or Malays (McArthur 1987). The Murut have had close links with Brunei Darussalam and this is reflected in their status in the Brunei Constitution as one of the ethnic groups that is considered Malay. According to Abd Latif (2001), the term 'Murut' originated from the word *menurut* (obedient) that was conferred on this ethnic group by the 25<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Hashim (1885-1906), for their obedience. The Murut refer to themselves as '*Lun Bawang*'<sup>1</sup>, which means *orang asli* (native people) or *orang Bumi* (People of the earth).

The other two ethnic groups that make up Malays in Brunei Darussalam are the Belait and Tutong. They seem to be closely identified with the district they inhabit. These groups also have their own languages and use these when communicating within their own groups. There have not been many studies in regard to these ethnic groups other than linguistic ones, but, they seem to have close affinity with peoples elsewhere in Borneo<sup>2</sup> (Brown 1970).

Apart from the above-mentioned ethnic groups, the Brunei Constitution also recognises other indigenous groups, such as the Iban, Penan and Kelabit, but they are not considered as *puak jati* or native ethnic groups of Brunei Darussalam. In 2002, it was reported that there are only 108 Penan in the State (*Rampai Pagi* [Daily Morning TV programme] 26.01.2002). Similarly, the Kelabit exist in small numbers only.

The Iban are a people of the north-western region of the island of Borneo. Sandin (1967:2 in Graham 1987:3) suggests the Iban originally came from Middle East and migrated to Sumatra and thence to the Kapuas River Basin in Western Borneo. They then spread into Sarawak in a series of irregular migrations, which stopped about the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Iban in Brunei Darussalam are believed to have migrated from Sarawak, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Graham 1984) looking for work after oil was

discovered in Brunei Darussalam. According to the census in 1991, the Iban made up 6% of Brunei Darussalam's population. Of that 6%, 36% are registered as citizens of Brunei Darussalam, 41% are permanent residents and 23% are temporary residents. The residential position of the Iban in Brunei Darussalam can be divided into three categories. First, those who were born and have resided in Brunei Darussalam for a long time are recognised as Brunei Darussalam citizens through registration. They hold yellow identification cards. Second, the Iban who have resided in Brunei Darussalam for certain amounts of time, but are not yet recognised as Brunei Darussalam citizens, however they are registered as 'permanent residents' and hold purple identity cards. Third, those are defined as *pendatang* (immigrant) or temporary residents. This group hold green identity cards and are treated like other foreigners who have come to Brunei Darussalam for employment.

The residential status of the Chinese in Brunei Darussalam is similar to the Iban. The Chinese have a long history in Brunei. The *Syaer Awang Semaun* recounts that Ong Sum Peng, a Chinese Muslim was married to Princess Ratna Dewi, the daughter of first Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Muhammad Shah (1368-1402). At the same time, Ong Sum Peng's sister was married to the Sultan's brother, Sultan Ahmad, who later became the second sultan of Brunei. However, Chinese mass immigration to Brunei Darussalam only occurred in the early twentieth century; the British Resident gained the revenue from agriculture and trade monopolized by the Chinese (Abd Latif 2001). Now, the Chinese make up 15% of Brunei's population and constitute the largest minority group in Brunei Darussalam. Through their involvement in business and trade, they also play a significant role in Brunei's economy.

### **The Conceptualisation of 'Malayness' in the Context of the Brunei Darussalam Situation.**

The Malays are one of the largest groups in the world. According to Syed Husin Ali (1979), from a general social and cultural perspective, Malays are people who reside in and are dispersed around the Malay Archipelago, including

Indonesia and the Philippines. They are divided into a number of different ethnic groups with their own dialects and languages. Earlier times saw the rise of empires, such as Srivijaya, Majapahit and Malacca, which dominated most of the Malay Peninsula and islands in the archipelago. With the fall of these empires, the territories under their domination were divided into smaller parts each with their own government.

Western colonisation established political boundaries that separated the Malays into different countries. The Dutch colonised a cluster of islands that is now known as Indonesia, whereas the British colonised the Malay peninsula and the northern part of the island of Borneo, including Brunei Darussalam, which was a British protectorate until 1984. While under their power, the colonial administrators tended to pursue policies of religious polarisation in Brunei Darussalam by facilitating the spread of non-Islamic religions, especially in the rural areas (Abd Latif 2003a:228). In addition, ethnic groups were labelled by locality, as well as religion. Political boundaries and religious connotation have thus been problematized in interpreting the 'Malays'.

The stipulation of the formal identity of Malayness according to the interpretation in Brunei's constitution and national philosophy, Malay Islamic Monarchy, is a category intended to establish a homogenous society from a political perspective as the foundation to Malay sovereignty. The significance of the reformation of Malay identity in Brunei Darussalam is not only in its existence as an independent nation, but also as a political entity re-establishing its sovereignty as a nation that was once a powerful empire in the archipelago. Therefore, the clustering of indigenous ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam into a single category of 'Malay' is intended to strengthen the political entity as a Malay sultanate. However, such legal categorization seems to be problematic, especially from the grass roots perspective.

The concept of ethnicity is paradoxical. According to Brunei's 1959 constitution, the term 'Malay' combines the seven genuine ethnic groups of Brunei (*puak jati Brunei*<sup>3</sup>) (genuine ethnic groups to Brunei Darussalam) into a single category irrespective of religious denomination. In addition, legally, the

terms ‘Malay’ and *puak jati* in Brunei Darussalam have the same connotation. This is not the case in the neighbouring state of Malaysia. There the term ‘Malay’ is defined as ‘those who profess the religion of Islam, habitually speak the Malay language, and conform to Malay customs....’ (Halim 2000: 136), whereas the term *bumiputera* refers to:

for the Sarawak case, a citizen from any ethnic group stated in section (7) as indigenous to the country or mixed descent of the ethnic groups; In Sabah, a citizen must be the child or grandchild of someone from one of the indigenous groups in Sabah, and born in Sabah or the father, at the time the person was born is a resident of Sabah (Syed Husin 1979:5-6: my translation from Malay text).

In reality such a definition may be debatable as Islam is not exclusively for Malays, although Islam has become significant marker of identity for Malays (Kerlogue 2000), especially in Southeast Asia. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society where increasing numbers of non-Malays are now fluent in Malay and have adopted the Islamic religion and practise Malay customs. Therefore, by definition, it is certainly possible for non-Malays who converted to Islam, speak fluent Malay and practice Malay customs to adopt Malay identity in Malaysia.

The legal interpretation of Malay in Brunei Darussalam refers to ethnic identity rather than Islamic religion. However, such legalistic interpretation must be juxtaposed to everyday usage, in which the term ‘Malay’ is widely accepted to have religious rather than ethnic connotations (Abd Latif 2001). From this perspective, the term ‘Malay’ has indeed a religious connotation, i.e. those who profess Islam. Members of particular ethnic groups often identify themselves with the name of their ethnic group rather than referring to themselves as Malay. In most cases, indigenous non-Muslim ethnic groups residing in the interior use the term ‘Malay’ when referring to Muslims. For them, conversion to Islam is perceived as *masuk Melayu* (becoming Malay). However, they also refer to themselves as *bangsa Brunei* (Brunei nation) or *orang Brunei* (Brunei people) rather than *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) or *orang Melayu* (Malay people) (Abd Latif 2003a: 229).



There is variation in how Brunei officials interpret *bangsa* (race) on the national identity cards. For the Brunei Malays, under *bangsa*, they are usually labelled *Melayu* (Malay), whereas for non-Muslims, such as Dusun, they are registered as 'Dusun' according to their ethnic group. Meanwhile, for Dusun who convert to Islam, the additional label of 'Muslim' is appended.

Among indigenous groups, such as the Iban and the Penan, and non-Muslim citizens, such as the Chinese, conversion to Islam is conceptualised as a conversion to Malay ethnicity. A number of them who have converted to Islam have lost their identities and entered into the Malay ethnicity (Maxwell 1980: 170, in Martin and Sercombe 1996: 309). Not only do they adopt the Islamic way of life, but they also tend to take up the Malay culture. There has been a gradual move towards embracing the Islamic faith among some of the indigenous groups in Brunei as such conversion opens up new opportunities in education, employment and commerce, thus in turn leading some of them to change their ethnic identities and 'becom[e] Malay' (King 2001).

### **Social Organisation.**

Brunei society is highly stratified and can be viewed as a pyramid. In general, the people of Brunei Darussalam are divided into two major groups: Nobles and non-nobles. The sultan is at the top of the hierarchy. The nobles can be divided into two sub-categories; the core nobility and lower nobility. All present nobles trace their descent from former nobles and are known generally as *Pengiran*. All persons who are relatively close descendents of the Sultan or high noble officials are the core nobility and are known locally as *Raja-raja Betaras*. The lower nobility is occasionally referred to as *Pengiran Kebanyakan* or ordinary/common nobles. An unmarried noble male is entitled *Awangku*, and the title *Dayangku* is used by an unmarried female noble.

The non-nobles also can be divided into two categories. They are the higher non-nobility and the commoners. Higher non-nobles are descendants of holders of high non-noble offices and known as the *awang-awang*. Traditionally, they were given a title at birth, such as *Awang* for a male and *Dayang* for a

female. However, according to a 1964 government directive, the title that is given to all non-noble citizens, including foreigners, has come to mean simply Mister for male; Miss or Mrs for a female. Commoners include non-Malay groups and the non-noble citizens of Brunei Darussalam.

### **System of Kinship and Marriage.**

The kinship system in Brunei Darussalam is structured with bilateral kinship organisation (Hashim 2003). However, the children receive their father's name (this is not a surname) and the nobility is explicitly recruited patrilineally. The tendencies towards the male line are, however, balanced by emotional ties to one's mother, with a resulting solidarity of children of one mother, and by preference for matrilocal residence. After a wedding, the groom comes to live at his bride's family home, although such arrangement is not always permanent.

Monogamous marriage is the most common marriage pattern in Brunei Darussalam. Although polygyny is permitted for Muslims, it is rarely practised. Marriage is a family affair and parents play a significant role in giving their consent. Traditionally, arranged marriage was common as parents choose the partners of their children. Frequently, to safeguard their social status and prevent property from going to strangers, parents prefer to marry off their children to their own kinsmen, or within the same ethnic group and social stratum, especially the nobles. Marriages across the lines of social stratification have also been practised; however, endogamy was preferred, especially for female nobles. For men, marrying within their social status maintained the status of their children, whereas marriage to a low status woman caused the children minor deficiencies of descent compared to those whose parents were both of noble status. The child of noble women who married below their status had the status of their father. In addition, the husband also had to make a '*tebus bangsa*' (status settlement), which entailed him giving his wife's family money or valuables, as a compensation for their differences in rank or status (Abd Latif 2003a: 134; Hashim 2003: 66). Now, arranged marriages are no longer common, as people prefer to find their own partners; and *tebus bangsa* is rarely practised. However, approval from the

parents remains significant. Intermarriage either between different ethnic or social groups has also been widely accepted. When a Muslim wants to marry a non-Muslim, it is an obligatory for the non-Muslim to convert to Islam prior to the marriage.

### **Political Structure.**

Brunei Darussalam is an absolute monarchy in which the Head of State is also the head of Government. It practises a dual system of government, combining both the traditional and modern, which Brown (1970) calls a complex system of government. The traditional system is still practised, but is more relevant to the royal court. The modern system of government is responsible for the administration of the state as a whole.

#### **The Traditional Political System.**

The traditional system uses the code of government and laws drawn from the Johore-Malacca government (Brown 1970; Gunn 1997). However, some modifications have been made to suit the local situation. The system was essentially designed to administer the Sultanate, and included judging criminal offences, levying taxes and controlling trade (Leys 1998).

The system correlates in large measure with the stratification of the Brunei Sultanate. It parallels the division of Brunei society into noble and non-noble strata and is differentiated by official orders of nobles and non-nobles (Brown 1970). The traditional institutional structure is based on seniority and birth rank of the bearer. However, merit and other considerations, such as bravery, loyalty, prudence and knowledge (see Pengiran Yusof 1958) may also partially determine the rank of office (Siti Norkhalbi 2000). These personal characteristics have been crucial in reflecting the duties and responsibilities that are assumed by the officials, such as in the fields of law, royal custom and norms, defence and security, economics and trade, as well as religion (Hashim 1999).

At the top of the hierarchy is the Sultan whose office is hereditary. Under the traditional political system, before the British protectorate, the state was administered by the Sultan who was assisted by an organisation of *orang-orang*

*bergelar* (invested officials) who were both nobles and non-nobles. The inaugurated traditional officials are also invested with a specific title unique to individuals. For example, the title *Pengiran Kerma Negara* is bestowed upon a traditional noble minister, and *Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja* is a title bestowed upon traditional non-noble officials. These titles also indicate the office and rank of the traditional dignitaries who had undergone the investiture ceremony in the social and political hierarchy. The Sultan held absolute power, but the duties and responsibilities for administering the state were distributed among the invested officials giving them certain amount of political power.

The viziers appear to have been mostly from the core nobility. Traditionally, there were four viziers<sup>4</sup>, however, in 1971, an additional post of head vizier was appointed and locally known as the *Pengiran Perdana Wazir*, literally translated as supreme vizier. The other viziers were called *Pengiran Bendahara*. Before 1971, the *Pengiran Bendahara* used to be the highest position among the viziers<sup>5</sup>. He held the power or authority of the Sultan if the latter was away from the country, as well as functioning as the highest official in matters of the Islamic religion. *Pengiran Digadong* was the highest official responsible for the wealth of the country, as well as the highest official of the Defence. *Pengiran Pemanca* was the chief of the Home Affairs and the state's Custom and Law; and the *Pengiran Temanggong* was the Fleet Admiral and Chief of Information.

The sub-viziers are locally known as the *Cheteria*, and were ranked in fours, eights, sixteens and thirty-twos. However, extra posts were created to supplement within the division<sup>6</sup>. For instance, one *Cheteria* in the category of *Cheteria* four and two in the category of *Cheteria* sixteen were appointed by the 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei Darussalam. At royal functions, the ranks of these noble officials can be distinguished through their ceremonial costume<sup>7</sup>.

Offices held by non-nobles correspond to those held by the nobility. They are collectively called *Manteri* (minister/ officer). However, differentiation within the non-noble officialdom is considerably more complex than within the noble orders (Brown 1970). Generally, non-noble officials are divided into two categories: higher non-noble officials and lower non-noble officials. Formal

ways of distinguishing between the two are their mode of inauguration, as well as their ceremonial costume. Similar to the noble officials, the higher non-noble officials are inaugurated with a sacred formula, *chiri*, composed of Sanskrit, Arabic and Malay words (Pengiran Yusof 1958). Generally, they are bestowed the title *Pehin*. They are also ranks in four, eight, sixteen and thirty-two. These numbers indicate the ranking of the officials as the lower the number, the higher the ranking within the office. For example, officials in rank four are higher than officials in rank eight. These numbers are ceremonial and reflect attributes of Hinduism, which continues to influence the traditional political system of Brunei Darussalam.

The lower non-noble officials are also divided into two sub-categories. First, there are officials who are prominently responsible in conducting state affairs. Second, there are officials who are responsible for religious matters. The lower non-noble officials are confined to offices, such as *Manteri Hulubalang* (Defence officers), *Manteri Istana* (Palace officers), *Manteri Darat* (Interior land officers) and *Manteri Pedalaman* (Rural officers). Despite the traditional political system being replaced by the modern system of administration for practical purposes, the appointment of traditional officials continues. Apart from playing a ceremonial role, these officials are a bridge between the Sultan and his subjects, offering him advice on matters affecting the nation as a whole (Hashim 1999).

#### Modern System of Administration.

The beginning of the modern system of administration occurred in 1906 when the first British Resident responsible for Brunei Darussalam's affairs was appointed by the British government. The power of the Resident encompassed virtually every aspect of executive, judicial and legislative branches of the government (Hussainmiya 1995). The Resident had freedom of action, as well as greater administrative and legal power, and wider fields in which to exercise them. However, the British Resident could not intervene on matters that affected the Islamic religion.

The establishment of government under the new administration replaced the traditional offices. Initially, there was a shortage of local people with

appropriate training or education to be employed in the new departments so overseas born Malays were employed to fill in the gaps. In addition, Europeans were employed as departmental heads especially in technical areas, such as public works, customs and agriculture (Brown 1970).

When oil was discovered in Seria of Belait district, in 1929, the economic situation was transformed, although full development was delayed by the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien III, the twenty-eighth Sultan, who reigned between 1950 and 1967, utilised Brunei's oil revenue to finance for the first time a Five-Year National Development Plan (1953-1958). This gave Brunei an extensive infrastructure and transformed it into a modern thriving state.

One of the emphases of the National Development Plan was the development of education. Although the British introduced the first formal school in 1914 (Gunn 1997: 69), Bruneian response was not enthusiastic. The official report on Brunei for 1920 made the observation that the people of Brunei were not ready for universal compulsory education. Blame was squarely placed upon the 'lethargy of parents' (Gunn 1997:70), but more importantly, the parents were sceptical about secular education and seeing these to be part of and parcel of an attempt to gradually convert the children to Christianity by the British (Mas Irun, Suziyati and Asmali 2000).

Education was made compulsory in 1929, and opportunities were given for the Bruneians to study overseas. In 1932, there were five students sent to Perak, Malaysia to pursue their education (Zaini 2003: 13). Later, more students were sent abroad; and this meant more locals were qualified to fulfil the requirements of offices needed to administer the country. Not only were they eligible as ordinary staff, but a few also had the ability to head departments. Thus, such developments have provided the opportunities for Bruneian society and continue to act as an avenue for social mobility to the present time.

In 1959, the promulgation of a written constitution gave Brunei internal-self government. The post of Resident was abolished and replaced by a High Commissioner. The British High Commissioner continued to be responsible for

Brunei's defence and international affairs, and advised the Sultan on other matters which did not affect the Islamic religion, although it was not specified to what extent the British were allowed involvement in regard to Malay customs and traditions (Abdul Latif 1994).

The 1959 constitution also stated the constituting values of the state's ideology, particularly the executive power of the Sultan and the official status of the Islamic religion and the Malay language. After about a century of being under the protection of the British government, Brunei Darussalam proclaimed its full independence in 1984. In the Declaration of Independence, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam re-emphasized the values embodied in the state's philosophy affirming the status of Brunei Darussalam as a Malay and Islamic Monarchy:

...Brunei Darussalam is and with the Blessing of Allah (All Pure, Most Exalted) shall be forever a sovereign, democratic and independent Malay Islamic Monarchy based upon the teachings of Islam according to *Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jema'ah* [the Sunni] and based upon the principles of liberty, trust and justice and ever seeking the guidance and blessing of Allah (All Pure, Most Exalted) the peace and security, welfare and happiness of Our people and the maintenance of friendly relations among nations on the principle of mutual respect for [the] independence, sovereignty, equality and territorial[ity] of all nations free from external interference. (Mohd Jamil 1998: 197).

After the proclamation of Independence, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam declared the setting up of a new government. Brunei Darussalam is a constitutional sultanate. The monarch is both the head of state and of the government. The members of the Council of Cabinet Ministers are appointed by and presided over by the monarch. The monarch named himself the Prime Minister and other nobles and non-nobles to hold other ministerial offices. As the head of state as well as head of government, the monarch holds absolute supreme authority in the governance of the nation. Currently, he also took on the Minister of Defence and Minister of Finance portfolios.

Administratively, the state is divided into districts. A District Officer, appointed by the government, is assigned to each district as the main official.

Each district comprises various *mukims* or dwelling places and each is looked after by a *Penghulu* (a chief). In addition, a dwelling place comprises several villages. A headman or *Ketua* is elected to handle the affairs of each village. Both Chiefs and Headmen are elected from selected nominees approved by the Government (Bantong 1993) and are directly responsible to the District office. They also receive salaries from the Government. At present, both nobles and non-nobles may be nominated to hold the positions of both the Chief and the Village Headman. In the Government administrative structure, the Village Headman (*Ketua Kampong*) occupies a lower rank than the Chief (*Penghulu*).

Full independence, stronger Islamic influences and educational opportunities have provided changes in the political and social structure in Brunei Darussalam. Education has increased opportunity among the qualified people, noble or non-noble, to hold high positions especially in the government departments. Social mobility among commoners, including those from the minority ethnic groups, has increased, especially for university graduates and those who hold high positions in the civil service. This not only provides them avenues into the modern system of government, but it also provides access to highly privileged positions in the traditional court system. The traditional stratification system is still maintained, although it is not static. Upward social mobility is also possible for Chinese and Indians in both the modern and the traditional systems.

#### The Classification of Status.

There are many features that are used to denote the status and rank of a person in Brunei society. One way is the seating arrangement during a royal court or state functions (see plate 1). Seating arrangements are measured by *di atas* (upper) and *di bawah* (lower). Those of highest rank are seated at the upper end, which is usually the furthest from the entrance. In descending order of rank the remaining guests are seated towards the entrance. A seating position on the right or left also expresses gradations of precedence, with those seated on the right being higher than those on the left (Brown 1970:21).





**Plate 1: The higher non-noble officials are seated in accordance with their rank.**

(Photo: <http://www.brunei-online.com/sunday/news/apr11h1.htm>, accessed 13 April 2004)

In the past, women were not usually seated with men. Women, if present at all, were seated in back rooms. Now, presumably as a concession to modernisation and to European influence, a number of deviations from the traditional seating arrangements are now common at royal and other ceremonies. Women now sit next to their husbands (see plate 2) and women of higher ranking official position are seated at the same level as their male counterparts.



**Plate 2: The wives of the dignitaries now sit next to their spouses when attending certain royal court functions.**

(Photo: <http://www.infofotogallery.com>, accessed 18 September 2004)

Linguistic usage also marks social status and rank. Title either given at birth or conferred by the ruler upon a person is another factor that distinguishes social class. For instance, *Pengiran Muda* (Prince) is the title used for sons of the Sultan and the eldest son of the viziers with their noble wives (Pengiran Yusof 1958:9). The daughter of the Sultan is entitled *Pengiran Anak Puteri* (Princess).

In addition, certain honorifics locally termed as *terasul* are also attached to an individual's title and name in accordance with their rank. Most of these honorifics are attached to offices, but in some cases they are hereditary. For example, *Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia* (His Majesty) or literally translated as 'beneath the extremely glorious' is attached to the beginning of the ruling Sultan's name, while *Duli Yang Teramat Mulia* (the most glorious) and *Yang Teramat Mulia* (the most illustrious), which are loosely translated as His/ Her Highness, are used for the children and other siblings of the Sultan. The honorific *Yang Amat Mulia* is used for the children of the sultan's siblings, as well as the inaugurated traditional noble officials.

The non-noble officials can also have certain honorifics attached at the beginning of their title and names. For example, *Yang Dimuliakan lagi Dihormati* is an honorific attached to the most senior non-noble inaugurated officials. Other forms of honorific are also attached to the others according to their rank (see table 1). For ordinary citizen, *Yang Mulia* (the respected) is used as a matter of courtesy.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Honorific (<i>Terasul</i>)</b>
The Sultan / The <i>Raja Isteri</i> (Queen)	<i>Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia</i> (Beneath the Extremely Glorious)
The Sultan's children and siblings	<i>Duli Yang Teramat Mulia</i> (the Most Glorious)/ <i>Yang Teramat Mulia</i> (the most illustrious)
The Sultan's sibling's children	<i>Yang Amat Mulia</i> (the Glorious)
Inaugurated Traditional Noble officials	<i>Yang Amat Mulia</i> (the Glorious)
Cabinet Minister	<i>Yang Berhormat</i> (the Honourable)
The Chief Non-Noble traditional officials	<i>Yang DiMuliakan lagi dihormati</i> (the distinguished and Honoured)
Higher Non-Noble traditional officials	<i>Yang DiMuliakan</i> (the distinguished)
Lower Non-Noble officials	<i>Yang Mulia</i> (the respected)

**Table 1: The Honorific (*terasul*) chart for some of the dignitaries and officials.**

The usage of court language or *Bahasa Dalam* (literally translated as inner language) is also employed to indicate social rank. The court language is usually used when communicating with the royal persons and the inaugurated officials. The expression of rank is found in the words used for the first, second and third persons. For instance, the Sultan should be addressed as *Kebawah Duli Tuan Patek* (Your Majesty). All persons when referring to themselves used the term *kaola* (I, me) when communicating with Pehin i.e. higher non-noble officials. I had to use court language when conducting interviews with my noble and higher-noble official informants. In addition, there are also some altered usages of words, especially when communicating with the royal persons. For example, the word 'speech' is altered to *titah* when the speech is made by the Sultan, but it is replaced with *sabda* when other royalties and higher noble officials deliver the speech. Not only are such words employed in the Malay language, but they have

also been adopted in English when used locally. The use of the alternate word indicates the status of the referent.

The right to perform *laila sembah* (gesture of respect) is also one way of identifying the office and rank of officials (see plate 3). According to Brunei royal custom, such gesture is limited to officials who are installed with a traditional title and have undergone an investiture ceremony. When performing such gesture, the official lifts both arms and brings both palms together on his forehead towards the Sultan or the highest person in audience. The Sultan returns the gesture at the level of his nose if the official he is addressing is of a high rank; if the official is of low rank, the Sultan only performs the gesture at the level of his chest.



**Plate 3: The Sultan returning the gesture of respect.**

(Photo: <http://www.brunet.bn/news/pelita/14april/pelita/htm>, accessed on 19 April 2004)

Ceremonial dress worn by invested officials during royal court functions denotes the ranks of the wearer. Traditional woven cloths of specific colour and motifs are worn by certain officials as part of their ceremonial dress (see chapter

six). Personal standards<sup>8</sup> and umbrella are also used as tangible markers of ranks. The personal standards are fairly precise indicators of the office and descent of some officials. Whereas those of noble descent have a personal standard, common citizens are to fly the state flag. The colour of the personal standard of the traditional officials is similar to their ceremonial costume.

The use of umbrellas as an insignia of rank in Brunei Darussalam is confined to the uppermost level of Brunei society (see plate 4). On ceremonial occasions, an umbrella bearer carrying an umbrella of the colour appropriate to the official accompanies the Sultan and the Viziers. On some occasions, the children and spouses of these officials are also accompanied by an umbrella. Their status may be identified by different colour and stripes running along the ribs of the umbrella. For instance, the Sultan's and the Raja Isteri's (Queen) umbrellas are yellow, whereas the supreme vizier's and his wife's are white.

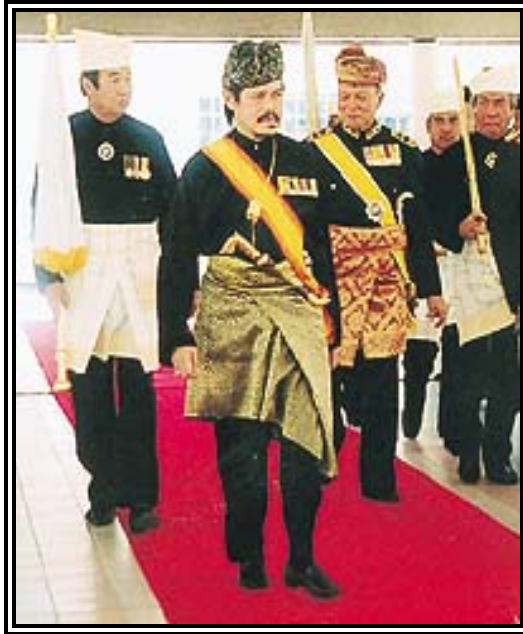


**Plate 4: Umbrella bearers standing behind the dignitaries.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)

Other emblematic regalia, such as the candles, mat, royal swords, shields, spears, guns, cartridge containers, golden betel container, golden pipes and many others, may also correspond directly to specific titles, or may simply indicate that the holders of those certain regalia are prominent officials or titleholders (see plate 5). These artefacts are borne by the officials or escorts who accompany the Sultan, the viziers and certain traditional dignitaries and officials, especially

during ceremonial occasions. However, higher officials will only have certain objects according to their rank. In addition, the number of the escorts who bear the artefacts would not be the same for all officials. The more escorts accompanying such officials, the higher the rank is in the social hierarchy.



**Plate 5: The Supreme Vizier escorted by four officials bearing royal regalia i.e. umbrella, royal sword and shield, *kaskol* (betel nut container) and spear.**

(Photo: <http://www.brunei-online.com/sunday/news/apr11h1.htm>, accessed 13 April 2004).

#### The Symbolism of Power.

In the traditional political system, being invested with a certain office or title not only brings honour, but it also entails duties and responsibilities in a hierarchical structure of political authority (Mohd Jamil 2003a). These officials are responsible as the ‘eyes and ears’ and the messengers of the ruler to the subjects and vice-versa (Pengiran Ahmad 1988). In addition, they are also responsible to assist with administration and develop the state. Thus, the bestowal of title not only is an apprehension of social status, but it also embeds an element of political power.

There have been some changes in the traditional political system. Some of these aspects of office-holding are not as fully observed, especially in regards to



the administration of the state, as they were in the former times; there are some elements that are still maintained to a certain degree, especially those that are pertinent to the traditional custom. The ceremonies bestowing titles are still carried out, although such titles do not necessarily bring the same duties and responsibilities as in former days. Now, certain persons who have received such titles may perform entirely different duties and responsibilities in accordance with the modern political system. Nevertheless, such conferment of titles provides the official a certain degree of power in the political system. In other words, the traditional political element is maintained, but the application has been modified to befit the modern political system. For example, in former times, the noble title *Pengiran Kerma Negara* was the Chief of Defence, whereas the higher non-noble title *Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja* was the supervisor of information (see Pengiran Yusof 1958). In the present time, the noble who holds *Pengiran Kerma Negara* is a pensioner who once worked in the Land Department, whereas *Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja*<sup>9</sup> holds a post as the Principal of the Brunei History Centre.

The title is also related to the stratification system of Brunei society. Appointment to office is embedded in a hierarchical system in which the traditional noble officers rank above the traditional non-noble officers (Brown 1970:25). These offices tended to be filled by giving consideration to the birth status of the recipients. Only a noble can be appointed to the vizier and sub-vizier offices, while commoners may fill the non-noble offices. However, merit and other considerations, such as loyalty, bravery, prudence and knowledge, may also partially determine the rank of the office of the recipients (Siti Norkhalbi 2000:30). In addition, contribution to the Sultan and the development of the state as a whole is another factor that has to be taken into consideration. Besides, better economic status and having an extensive network of relatives (*tabal saudara-saudaranya*) will also be a priority. I was told by the senior officer at the *Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara* (Department of the State Customs) that such an extensive network is a significant indication that he also has strong supporters so as to strengthen the social and political system.

The officials hold the title conferred permanently. The titleholder would still carry the title even when he is no longer alive. However, it is not unusual for the officials to be promoted to a higher rank and receive a different title, but within the same office. The title may be hereditary, as the heir of an official may be inaugurated with the same title given to his predecessor. However, there are cases where the sons of officials are inaugurated, but receive different titles to their fathers. One example is my best friend's father who was recently inaugurated. Both her father and grandfather were inaugurated with the office of *Pehin Manteri* (high non-noble office), but each of them carried a different title and rank. Her grandfather was appointed a high non-noble minister of rank eight and carried a title *Pehin Orang Kaya Maharaja Diraja*, whereas her father is positioned at rank thirty-two and invested with the title *Pehin Orang Kaya Maharaja Kerna* (see Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara 2000).

During the period before the British protectorate, the conferment of certain titles correlated with an appointment of office and responsibility for certain duties (Pengiran Yusof 1958: 11-32) thus granting a certain amount of political power to the appointed officers. Certain officials were allotted a *kuripan* (territorial rights), granting the official the responsibility to administer the revenue from the land, people or levy taxes on trade (Leys 1998). The official was also responsible for exercising the law within his domain, but crimes that involving death or mutilation as a punishment had to be tried before one of the viziers responsible i.e. *Pengiran Temenggung*; and infliction of such punishment had to gain approval from the Sultan (Leys 1998:136). The appanage was only granted to the official in regard to his attachment to a certain office, and he had no right to bequeath it to his own family member. The appanage or *kuripan* was theoretically passed back to the Sultan when an official died or was demoted. However, sometimes the appanage did not appear to be returned to the Sultan when the official died because his position was usually taken over by his heir. Thus, the rights over the territory were kept de facto through generations by the members of his family. When the British Resident was in power, the system was abolished and the rights to administer the appanage were transferred to the



government. Thus, the government, in effect the Resident, then had centralised control of Brunei (Brown 1970:85).

### **Institutional Structure of Religion.**

When Brunei Darussalam regained its Independence in 1984, the Sultan of Brunei proclaimed that Brunei Darussalam would forever be a Malay Islamic Monarchy. Islam in line with the Sunni sect and Al-Shafie school of thought is the official religion of Brunei Darussalam. The Sultan is the head of the Islamic faith in the country. Chapter 3, part 1 of the Brunei constitution also states that ‘the official religion for the state of Brunei is the religion of Islam according to the *Ahlussunnah Wal-Jemaah* of the Al-Shafiee school’ and that ‘the Sultan is the head of the religion of Islam’ (chapter 3, part 2) (Abdul Aziz 1993: 9). As stated in the 1959 Constitution and the Declaration of Independence in 1984, non Muslims are free to preserve and practise their faith.

The mention of Islamic values in the declaration of Independence referred to Islam as *ad-deen* or a way of life, not simply a religion that participants can find in the mosques, but a tradition with the potential to be relevant to every aspect of social life. This proclamation states that Islamic principles should be integrated into all aspects of life.

Education is one of the basic ways of proliferating knowledge and socio-cultural values. Islamic values aimed at strengthening the faith among Muslims and promoting awareness among non-Muslims are inserted into the education system through the curriculum and the co-curricular activities of both government and private schools. The first Islamic religious school was established in 1956 where a purely Islamic curriculum was being taught. Recently, the Ministry of Education has introduced an integrated system of education by which Islamic subjects taught in the religious school are now taught in government schools.

Islamic education is certainly not new. Before formal schools were established by the British in 1912, Islamic education had already been established in villages. Religious instructors, especially those who resided in Kampong Ayer, established *balai* (small halls) in which to teach. In those schools the syllabus

concentrated on the Islamic faith and practices, such as performing prayer and Quran reading.

### **Conclusion.**

Social stratification is one of the core aspects of Brunei Darussalam's national identity, as practised in a monarchical system of government. Although modern administration of governing has been implemented, a hierarchical system of social and political organisation is maintained. In the past, the stratification was based on birth inheritance, but the system has also been expanded to meritorious service and educational qualification. Persons who are contributing to the nation and loyal to the Sultan are acknowledged by way of appointing and investing them with certain titles, which also means upgrade in their social status. Education is another factor that provides social mobility, especially among commoners.

This chapter has shown that Brunei Darussalam has experienced multiple influences. These influences have been significant sources rooting the construction and reconstruction of Brunei's traditions. While Hindu Buddhist religious beliefs may not have exerted a great impact on the people, the influence of Hindu Buddhist cultural practices has seeped in Brunei's traditions. For instance, many of the customs associated with the Hindu Buddhist practice have been incorporated into the royal courts.

The coming of Islam had a great effect upon Bruneians. Although the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism cannot be denied as various elements of such influence remain persistently in Brunei Darussalam, the modes of expression and thought have been transformed and rearticulated by the acceptance and tolerance of Islam (Abd Latif 2003a).

This overview of Brunei Darussalam's background provides essential features that are linked to the production and consumption of textiles. Traditional woven textiles play important roles in Brunei society. They are used in keeping with traditions, as well as to construct identity. At ceremonies, traditional textiles are used as ceremonial dress, regalia and ornaments that denote social and

political status. In addition, traditional textiles are also manipulated to express national identity and as a signal of cultural continuity. The indigenous weaving tradition has, therefore, flourished to accommodate such needs. These issues will be addressed in coming chapters.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> In addition to Lun Bawang, the Murut are also known as Lun Dayeh.

<sup>2</sup> In terms of language, both ethnic groups speak similar language spoken in Berawan-Lower Berawan like the Kiput, Baram and Tinjar of Sarawak (Martin 1996).

<sup>3</sup> In Malaysia, *puak jati* is equivalent to *bumiputera* (son of the soil)

<sup>4</sup> In the modern system of the government, the viziers no longer perform the duties prescribed according to the system of traditional government.

<sup>5</sup> Before 1971, *Pengiran Bendahara* held the highest position among the viziers. When *Pengiran Perdana Wazir* post was created in 1971, *Pengiran Perdana Wazir* became the most senior position among viziers.

<sup>6</sup> In chapter six, I used the term ‘additional’ to refer to the supplementary officials, e.g. additional *cheteria* four.

<sup>7</sup> Further discussed in chapter six.

<sup>8</sup> Dignitaries in Brunei Darussalam have their own personal standard or flag which is flown instead of the state flag. The colour of the flag depends on the rank of the person. For instance, the Sultan’s personal standard is yellow, whereas the supreme vizier is white. Other dignitaries, such as *Cheteria* four, their flag is purple. The colour of the flag also corresponds with their ceremonial costume at the royal court.

<sup>9</sup> This official has been promoted and given new title – *Pehin Jawatan Dalam Seri Maharaja*.

### **Chapter Three**

## **Globalisation and Islamisation: Interacting Influences in the Transformation of Modes of Attire.**

### **Introduction.**

In Brunei Darussalam and in many other places, clothing has long played an important role as a marker of identity (Barnes & Eicher 1992; Chua 2000; Howard 2000; Lurie 1983; Nordholt 1997). Barth (1969:14, in Gunaratne 1998) asserts that actors in a given group will use clothing as a signal or sign to look for or exhibit identity. The mode and pattern of dressing are not only been important in reflecting ethnic background, but also other categories, such as religion, gender and occupation. The employment of certain accessories and types of clothing is also significant for determining status in many societies. Only certain people may be allowed to wear certain accessories. The manner and styles of clothing also reflect social status (Maxwell 1990).

The process of globalisation is influencing the evolution and transformation of clothing in Brunei Darussalam. Bruneians' interaction with the outside world has led to diversification and innovation of styles in clothing, but has also instigated homogenisation of styles and mode of clothing. This chapter examines the clothing worn by the Malays in Brunei Darussalam focusing on the role of clothing in the manifestation of identity. I intend to explore how certain modes and types of clothing exhibit gender, ethnic and religious identity in Brunei Darussalam.

The declaration of 'Malay Islamic Monarchy' as the national philosophy of Brunei Darussalam has been a means for inculcating an integrated set of values into the mind of the people of Brunei Darussalam. Islamic as well as Malay values of propriety can be said to filter some of the effects of globalisation. Displays of fashion have also been included in the appropriate cultural icons, and clothes are an effective way to display social values (Chua 2000). A modest mode of dressing, one that is appropriate to such values, has been encouraged at a national level, especially by government institutions. In this chapter, I explore the

role of government institutions in adopting traditional Malay costumes as attire for government employees and as the official or ceremonial dress when attending state and royal court functions.

Clothing is a fundamental need in most societies. Barnes and Eicher (1992) in their interdisciplinary and cross-cultural examination of dress and gender note that dress is one of the most significant markers of gender identity and that in many societies clothing is gender specific. According to Islamic teachings as specified in the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims are required to cover certain parts of their bodies. A general guidance to the proper mode of clothing is also outlined according to gender, age, and spatial and temporal contexts.

Generally, clothing serves as basic protection, but it also has social meaning (Barnes and Eicher 1992). Nordholt (1997:1) states that the importance of clothes in social contexts becomes apparent if one imagines how it would look if people in the street were naked. He suggests that individuals would immediately lose their familiar appearance and consequently, most of their identity (Nordholt 1997:1).

Barnes and Eicher (1992) suggest that in the domain of the cultural phenomenon, dress or clothing has several essential attributes. For example, it can be used to define a person's identity geographically and historically and the relationship of an individual to a specific community. It can serve as a sign that an individual is affiliated to a certain group, but also distinguish the same individuals from others within the group. Dress also can indicate the general social position of a person in the society in the political and social hierarchy. Furthermore, dress may also be a symbol of economic position. For instance, type and quality of materials can be used to demonstrate personal or communal well being.

There is an interrelationship between dress and ethnic identity (Chua 2000; Howard 2000). According to Chua (2000:281), clothing constitutes a significant site upon which 're-ethnicisation' – a process where multi-ethnic "traditions" can now be displayed as icons of both cultural pride and a sense of

continuity with a culturally distinguished past- is inscribed in Singapore. Chua particularly focuses on women's clothing of the Chinese, *cheongsam* and the Malays, *baju kurung* as sites of cultural exposure. Howard (2000) examines how patterns of traditional dress have developed and facilitated ethnic identification. For example, within the *koteka* (penis covering) zone in Irian Jaya (now known as Papua), differences in styles and additional items distinguish the member of one ethnolinguistic group from another. Wealthy Moni men usually wear a cushion on the loin made of plaited string and covered in grass husks, whereas Yali men wear series of rattan rings wrapped around the middle of their bodies, with a long penis sheath sticking out from underneath. Both authors also note that the use of clothing for identification has changed due to globalisation. In Singapore, cultural flows have provided relative absorption of global fashion for different groups of people, using ethnic, religious, class and general divisions (Chua 2000). In Papua, Dutch colonialism, Christian missionaries and Indonesian rule have all influenced local culture. The Dutch and Christian missionaries introduced the use of western clothing among the local indigenous people, especially when attending church services, which was seen as an integral part of their conversion efforts, whereas the Indonesian government has sought to promote nation building based on Javanese national culture and inculcating the practice of wearing Javanese-style batik clothing as a manifestation of Indonesianness (Howard 2000).

### **Early Clothing in Brunei Darussalam.**

There are several sources of documentation in regard to early forms of Bruneian clothing. Having long been a stopping point for visitors from Asia, the Middle East and Europe (Bantong 2001), Brunei Darussalam has been influenced by these cultures in regard to the style, fabric and design of clothing.

It is difficult to say when the first cloth made its appearance in Brunei Darussalam. However, during the Liang Dynasty of China (502-506 A.D), the King of Poli (Brunei) is reported to have worn clothing of embroidered silk, and his subjects woven clothes made of *ki-pei* [cotton], a type of plant which was used to make cloth (Pengiran Ismail 1997). In 1225, Chau Jua Kua noted that the

King of Brunei dressed in a similar fashion to the Chinese on formal occasions. The King of Brunei wore a Javanese sarong and gold ornaments for day-to-day wear (Bantong 2001). During the reign of Yong Le of the Ming dynasty (1403-1424), the Chinese reported that the men of Brunei bound their head with a piece of scarlet cloth, whereas the women let their hair hang down to their shoulders, tied scarves around their necks, wore shirts and skirts and went barefoot (Bantong 2001).

### **Indigenous Male Attire.**

Historically, among the animist inhabitants of Brunei Darussalam, such as the Murut, Belait<sup>1</sup>, Bisaya, Dusun and other indigenous groups, such as the Iban and Penan, their form of clothing was very basic and quite similar to each other. They wore *cawat* (loincloth) to cover genitals for everyday wear (see plate 6). However, loin cloths are rarely worn now, and have been replaced with trousers. For everyday wear, shorts may be worn. For ceremonial wear, they wore upper body clothing. The materials used to make the clothing varied among the ethnic groups. For instance, upper body clothing for the Murut was made of bark-cloth locally known as *baju timbaran*<sup>2</sup> (*timbaran* jacket) (see plate 7), whereas the Belait, Bisaya and Dusun used cotton. I was told a coarse and thick material known as *kain kipur* was used to make the clothes in the old days.





**Plate 6: A man wearing a loincloth (*cawat*).**

(Photo: AB Matnoor 2000: 190)

In the past, the Murut and Belait were intensely involved in the ritualised warfare of headhunting, locally known as *mengayau*. Capturing an enemy's head was the highest point of achievement for warriors, and successful head-hunters had higher status in the community. Upon their return from a headhunting expedition, a festival was held to celebrate their success. During the festival, the warriors wore a loincloth, jacket and headdress which served to distinguish the more successful head-hunters from the less successful. The length of loincloth also indicated the status of the wearer, as the longer the loincloth, the higher his status both socially and economically. According to my informants, cloths were scarce in the old days and there was a need to limit the length of the loin cloth. Due to the scarceness of cloths, they commended high prices, which not many people could afford them at the time. Therefore, the privilege of having a longer loin cloth indicated high economic status.

According to my Murut informant, upon the return from warfare and the capturing of an enemy's head, the warrior was celebrated at a dance festival called *alai ukoi*. At the dance festival, the most successful warrior would lead the dance. In addition to his *timbaran* jacket, a loincloth and red headdress, he would also

carry his sword and a basket where his enemy's head was stored. Traditionally, red was exclusively worn by the warriors in the Murut community and symbolised bravery. If a 'commoner' inadvertently wore red, it could invite 'spiritual tests' (sorcery might be involved) from higher status people within the ethnic group. In 2000, when I accompanied a group of undergraduate students for their fieldtrip to Kampong Senukoh in Temburong district, we were entertained with the dance. While performing the dance, the students were invited to join along. My informant told me that the purpose of the dance has now changed, as headhunting is illegal and has ceased to be practised. The performance of the dance has now been reinvented to welcome special guests. In order to maintain the tradition, my Murut informant told me that traditional ethnic costume is still worn at such performances.



**Plate 7: Male *timbaran* jacket of Murut ethnic group.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

According to my Belait informants, when Belait warriors or *hulubalang* came home from *mengayau*, they were not permitted to return to the house in which they resided until a ceremonial water sprinkling ceremony was held. The wife and other women who stayed in the house would sprinkle the water, taken from a nearby river, over the *hubulubalang*. Such ceremonies were performed to cast out bad omens (*membuang sial*). A warrior was only allowed to return to his

house after seven days during which water was continuously sprinkled. The head captured was kept in a huge basket and put before a small fire and smoked to dry. The head was kept to symbolise bravery. Upon the success of capturing the enemy's heads, the warriors were privileged to wear *teroko*, a special headgear decorated with bird's feathers. Such an honour indicated the warriors admittance to higher status within his community.

Those men now defined in Brunei Darussalam as Muslim Malays i.e. the Brunei, Kedayan, Tutong and Belait (after their conversion to Islam), commonly wear a tunic and a pair of long pants and/or *kain tajung* (a plaid-design tubular sarong). Each had a distinctive style. For instance, the Kedayan's tunic was round-necked, the trousers were body fitting, and had an additional rectangular cloth called *kakun* tied around the waist (see plate 8). This cloth was used as a belt and to carry food supplies. Traditional woven cloths of *Jong sarat* design which they called *kain basar* (big cloth) were worn only when attending royal court functions and at weddings. The terminology *kain basar* – big (*basar*) is used in the sense of great significance, not primarily in the sense of large size, as traditional woven cloths were only worn at grand occasions.



**Plate 8: Kedayan man wearing his ethnic traditional costume.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

Men from the Brunei ethnic group commonly wear *baju cara Melayu* (traditional Malay costume) consisting of a loose tunic, a pair of looser long pants and a short sarong i.e. *sinjang* of plaid, chequered or floral design of traditional woven cloth, which is worn over the trousers (see plate 9). A black *songkok* (Malay velvet cap) is used for ceremonial occasions and festivals, as well as to go to mosque to perform Friday prayer. A *kain tajung* and round neck shirt or singlet known as *baju sampang* is commonly worn at home. Shorts, locally known as *seluar puntung*, are frequently worn when working at home and playing sports.



**Plate 9: A group of men wearing *baju cara Melayu*.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

Plain black textiles are widely used for traditional costumes. However, *puak* Brunei also prefer to wear plain vibrant colours and the Murut, who formerly used bark cloths, keep the natural colour of bark for their contemporary costumes. In former times, generally, clothing for men was not usually decorated, but it appears to me that men now more often decorate their clothing. When I conducted my research at the National Day Anniversary in 2002 and 2003, and the *Bersama rakyat* (With the Subjects) programme commemorating the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday in 2002, I noticed that ethnic traditional costumes for men were decorated. At the ceremonies, some of the members of Malay ethnic groups wore their traditional ethnic costumes. For instance, the Murut now decorate their bark clothes with geometrical patterns across the main body of the jackets and red trimming along the edges of the sleeves and the central openings (see plate 10), whereas the Dusun, Bisaya and Belait sometimes affix golden trimmings or stripes to decorate their attire (see plate 11). These ethnic groups also use white and red stripes to adorn their clothing. Glitter is also used to make geometrical and floral patterns for ceremonial costumes. The Kedayan also adopted stripes, usually of red colour, along the trousers as a decoration. Most ethnic group have maintained black for traditional costumes in keeping with



tradition. However, it appears to me that the patterns and decorations are a new adaptation to distinguish ethnic backgrounds. This has shown that such cultural invention can be seen as the legitimating charter of group identity.



**Plate 10: Murut male and females wearing ‘traditional’ ethnic costume.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

There are different types of traditional Malay costumes, such as *baju cara Melayu teluk belanga* (high collar and fastened with several buttons – see plate 9), *baju cara Melayu cekak musang* (a flat round neck and slit at the front – see plate 8), *baju cara Melayu butang lima* (open front tunic fastened with five small buttons – similar to Bisaya’s ‘traditional’ tunic – see plate 11) and *baju cara Melayu begulambir* (an additional cloth about the size of handkerchief is attached at the front of the collar – see plate 12). Basically these are similar styles that can be distinguished through the design of the collar. Designs of traditional Malay costumes denote the status of the wearer. For instance, the *baju cara Melayu teluk belanga* and *baju cara Melayu cekak musang* were normally worn by commoners, whereas *baju cara Melayu begulambir* was designed for people of high status in the royal court (Bantong 2001). Nowadays, such practices are only loosely observed as not many people are aware of the traditional sartorial rules and symbols.



**Plate 11: Bisaya man wearing his ‘traditional’ ethnic costume.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Haji Mat Sa’id bin Tundak.)



**Plate 12: *Baju begulambir***

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

Traditional Malay attire has been adopted as the official attire in Brunei Darussalam. At certain state formal occasions, such as the National Day Anniversary, traditional Malay attire is prescribed for guests. Traditional Malay attire not only is worn by the Muslim Malays, but is now increasingly common among non-Malay Muslims and members of other ethnic groups, including the local Chinese, on such occasions. The use of traditional Malay attire has come to signify *identiti kebruneian* (Bruneian identity), hence, national identity. During the National Day Anniversary in 2002 and 2003, I found that traditional Malay attire was worn not only by the guests, but also by the participants who took part in the march, as well as spectators who came to see the events (see plate 13). The usage of traditional Malay attire has become a display of collective identity and a statement of nationalism.



**Plate 13: The participants marching past wearing national attire during the Anniversary of National Day of Brunei Darussalam in 2003.**

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah).

### **Court Appearances.**

The type and colour of the costume to be worn are often specified by the court when attending royal court functions. Some dignitaries and officials are given the appropriate ceremonial clothes by the royal court upon their appointment to the office. The ceremonial dress includes the traditional Malay



costume, *sinjang*, *arat* (belt) and *dastar* (specially folded head gear) or black *songkok* (velvet headgear). The ceremonial dress denotes the status of the wearer. Certain colours and designs distinguish the status of the wearer in the social and political hierarchy<sup>3</sup>. The colour of the *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar* differ according to the rank of the wearer. According to my informants, traditionally, the way in which the *sinjang* was worn and its length revealed the wearer's social and marital status. The general rule was 'the shorter the higher'. Thus, wearing a shorter length of *sinjang* – about six inches above the knees – indicated the wearer may be from the core nobility. This was in contrast with other Malay ethnic groups where the longer the length of loincloth, the higher the status. For the Brunei men, the cloth for the *sinjang* is usually standard in size, but it was folded to make it short as an indication of high status. The central design of the *sinjang* is placed at the back. If the centre is positioned slightly towards the right, this indicates that the wearer is already married, whereas the centre is located a little to the left for bachelors.



**Plate 14: Dignitaries of Brunei Darussalam wearing their ceremonial costumes at a royal court function.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department)

Another style of costume which has become popular is *baju gamis* (a long dress for men – see plate 14, the third man standing on the right), which is also known as *baju jubah* and made of (artificial) silk<sup>4</sup>, cotton or polyester. A pair of long pants is usually worn underneath. A head-dress known as *tengkolok*

(skullcap) or crocheted cap is usually worn to complement such attire. The attire originated from the Middle East and was introduced to Brunei in the 1940's (Bantong 2001). At the time, the *baju gamis* was worn by grooms; however, after the Japanese occupation in 1958 this fashion was no longer popular at weddings (Bantong 2001). Despite it not being popular for wedding attire, it remains popular among Muslim males who have just performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the Brunei perspective, people who have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca have fulfilled one of their obligations as a Muslim, thus symbolising completeness (Abd Latif 2003b). According to Islamic teaching, a Muslim must complete the five pillars of Islam and the final pillar is performing the Hajj to Mecca once in a lifetime for those who can afford it physically, spiritually and economically. And in order to perform the Hajj, a person has to be economically stable. Thus, performing the pilgrimage and wearing the *baju gamis* is evidence of having gained high economic and social status.

The *baju gamis* or *jubah* has always been related to as an Islamic code of dressing, although there is no specification in terms of style according to Islamic teachings as long as the dress conforms to the basic code of dressing i.e. decent<sup>5</sup>, clean and smart. The *baju jubah* has also been adopted in the royal court and worn by religious ministers and officials for their ceremonial dress to distinguish their position. The *baju jubah* has also become formal attire worn by the State Mufti<sup>6</sup> of Brunei Darussalam.

When the British Resident was in power in Brunei Darussalam, a modern system of governing was implemented. Apart from expatriates who were employed to fill executive positions, more locals were also recruited both in higher and lower offices. Western clothing had become popular among the office workers, and English-styled attire was eventually adopted, especially among the local 'elite' (Bantong 2001:12). At present, people working in the public and private sectors regardless of their ethnic background generally wear Western-style shirt and trousers for working and everyday attire. However, additional articles of clothing are used to reflect status or rank. For instance, male educators, as well as officers holding high level administrative positions, wear neckties. Senior

officers wear a three-piece suit for formal meetings and functions. Now, Western formal suits are also prominently worn at public and formal functions. The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam frequently wears a Western formal suit when attending formal functions (see plate 15), but he also wears traditional clothing when attending religious and certain royal court functions (see plate 16). It is also not unusual to see both traditional and Western costumes combined as the Western jacket is worn over the traditional costume.



**Plate 15: Both traditional and western types of clothing may be worn at formal functions.**

(Photo: <http://www.infofoto.org.bn/gallery>, accessed 9 December 2004).



**Plate 16: The Sultan and Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam wearing Malay traditional attire.**

(Photo: <http://www.infofoto.org.bn/gallery>, accessed 9 December 2004).

In the mid-1980s, a process of ‘reMalayanisation’<sup>7</sup> began which included not only the greater use of traditional Malay attire, but also the changing of the Western shirt collar to the traditional Malay tunic collar called *baju ala cara Melayu* (traditional Malay style tunic), also popularly known as *baju MIB* – *Melayu Islam Beraja*, taking after the Brunei Darussalam national philosophy (see plate 17). When I attended to present my paper in *Seminar Kebangsaan Calak Brunei* (National Seminar of Brunei Identity), jointly organised by the Supreme Council of Malay Islamic Monarchy and Academy of Brunei Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, in January 2004, one of the paper presenters, Awang Haji Sumadi bin Haji Sukaimi<sup>8</sup> presented a paper entitled *Belia Pemangkin Calak Brunei* (Youth as the upholder of Brunei Identity) in which he mentioned that the *baju ala cara Melayu* was popularised by Prince Jefri<sup>9</sup> (the youngest brother of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam), who at the time (1984 - 1985) was the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. Since then, this type of clothing has been followed as a model and is gaining popularity among men. In 2002, the Ministry of Education began encouraging its male officers to wear *baju cara Melayu* (traditional Malay costume) to work, especially on Mondays and Thursdays. For informal wear, T-shirt, jeans and other forms of modern casual attire have become popular among males (see plate 18).



**Plate 17: Men with headgears were wearing *baju ala cara Melayu* (*Baju MIB*).**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah)



**Plate 18: Jeans and casual shirts are popular for informal wear.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

Headgear is one of the noteworthy items in male Malay dress. Men usually wear headgear for formal and public functions, although it is not unusual for them to go bare-headed on a daily basis. According to Islamic tradition, it is commendable for men to cover their heads. In Malaysia, as suggested by Sheppard (1972: 110-113), the manner of folding the head-cloth worn by nobility has been a way of indicating the royal house to which the person belongs. In addition, the position of the tip of the head-cloth also signifies the social status of the wearer. When I asked my informants about such distinctions in Brunei Darussalam, only a few of them admitted that there were aware of this, but none were able to elaborate. At the display in the Brunei Museum, there are different types of headgear, as well as different ways of folding them indicating social and cultural distinction. The way in which the headgear was folded indicates the social status of the wearer (see plates 19 and 20).





**Plate 19: The folding of a high non-noble man's headgear.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Department of Brunei Museums.)



**Plate 20: The folding of a noble man's headgear.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Department of Brunei Museums.)

In addition, my observation of traditional types of headgear also suggested such a distinction. For example, men from *puak* Brunei usually wear *songkok*, whereas other Malay ethnic groups, such as Murut, Dusun and Kedayan wear head-cloths. The folding of the head-cloth also distinguishes ethnic background. For instance, the head-cloth of the Kedayan was folded to cover the top of the

head (see plate 21), whereas the Murut fold the head-cloth around the forehead with the top of the head completely uncovered and a triangular shape rising high in the centre. Now, head-cloths are only used on special occasions. For *puak* Brunei, head-cloth (*dastar*) of traditional woven cloth are worn as part of ceremonial costume at royal court functions and worn by the groom at his wedding. *Songkok* is now commonly worn at formal and public functions. For those who have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, white skullcap and *tengkolok* (plain or designed white cloth usually bought in Mecca and specially folded around the head) are also worn. In the old days, my informants explained that batik was usually used for special occasions, whereas plain white or black cloth was used for everyday wear. Now other forms of modern style headgear, such as baseball caps, are gaining popularity, especially among the youth for casual wear.



**Plate 21: Kedayan's headgear displayed at the Brunei Museum.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Department of Brunei Museums).

### **Female Attire.**

Females from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Brunei Darussalam tend to adopt similar styles of clothing. The standard women's costume consisting of sarong or skirt and blouse is worn by the majority of women for all major activities outside their home, from working in fields to attending festivals. Cotton is commonly used for everyday clothing, whereas other types of materials, such as silk and polyester, are preferred for formal occasions.

For home clothing, women in most ethnic groups wear a blouse combined with a batik sarong, locally known as *kain selendang*<sup>10</sup>. Women sometimes wear a batik sarong on its own which covers the body between the breast and the knees. This is locally known as *kamban*. However, this is only acceptable within the domain of the home. A top or an additional batik sarong was usually put on to cover the upper part of the body when going out of the house.



**Plate 22: The ladies wearing a blouse and *kain selendang*.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department).

For festive and ceremonial purposes, clothing is decorated with embroidery, beads, glitter and hollow silver ornaments filled with small pellets (*kubamban*). The design, style and decorations for festive occasions are the most distinctive manifestation of the wearer's ethnic identity. For instance, the Murut female costume consists of a three-quarter-length sleeved loose blouse and a knee-length tubeskirt. Moreover, beads and glitter in vibrant colours, such as red, white, yellow and green are used to decorate the dress (see plate 23). Headgear made from bright coloured yellow, red and black beads is commonly worn during festivals (see plate 24), whereas a triangular shaped hat is worn for everyday or working wear. Hats and belts are decorated with multicoloured beads and commonly used and sometimes silver belts are also used.





**Plate 23: Traditional costume for female from Murut ethnic group.**  
(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 24: Murut female headgear.**  
(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

The Belait, Dusun and Bisaya have a similar fashion to the Murut female costume for ceremonial purposes, but the skirt is longer than the Murut's and batik is sometimes used. Hollowed silver buttons filled with small pellets are commonly attached to the sleeves of the costumes. These buttons are generally

termed *kubamban*, thus lending their name to the article of clothing, *baju kubamban*. The Belait traditional costume has long sleeves (see plate 25), whereas the sleeves of the Dusun and Bisaya traditional costumes are short (see plate 26). In addition, the Dusun and Bisaya sometimes use beads and glitter of multiple colours arranged to make floral motifs to decorate the top. During festive occasions, such as weddings, the bride and bridesmaid usually wear golden or silver head ornaments. Other accessories, including gold or silver necklaces, ear rings and bangles, are also worn. Especially among the Dusun and Bisaya, old silver coins are made into brooches.



**Plate 25: Belait female traditional costume.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)



**Plate 26: The Bisaya ceremonial costumes.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Department of Information Department)

Amongst Malay females, *kebaya* (long-sleeved tight fitting tunic with front open which is held together by hooks or ornate pins), a loose blouse and batik sarong are commonly worn. Cotton is preferred for daily clothing, whereas silk and synthetic fabrics are used to make clothing for festive functions. *Baju kurung* (a long tunic that reaches to the knee as a top, worn with a loose sarong that reaches down to the ankle) or *kebaya* are commonly worn on social and ceremonial occasions, especially among the Brunei Malays. It is common to see Her Majesty Raja Isteri (the Queen of Brunei Darussalam) wearing *baju kebaya* when attending public and formal occasions, as well as royal court functions (see plate 27). Both *baju kebaya* and *baju kurung* are also commonly worn by wives of dignitaries and female officials both in government and the private sector when attending public and formal occasions. In addition, versions of *baju kurung*, such as *baju fesyen kurung moden* (modern fashion *kurung* clothes - similar in style to *baju kurung*, but cut differently) and *baju opah* (the top is similar to traditional *baju kurung*, but shorter, often having slits at the sides) are also popular. The *baju fesyen kurung moden* is frequently worn by the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's daughters when attending formal functions (see plate 28). A *kain kapit* of traditional cloth is worn around the mid-body over the clothing when

attending ceremonial functions hosted by those who are of socially higher status signifying honour towards the host/s (see plate 29).

It is usual for the top and sarong skirting to be either the same colour or colour coordinated. The fabrics for both top and sarong may have designs or be plain. As among males of Malay ethnic groups, black is the most popular colour for females' ceremonial traditional clothing. However, the *puak* Brunei also wear vibrant colours for their clothing; and for weddings, the bride and bridesmaid wear traditional woven clothes of bright colours. They also wear golden head ornaments or tiara, necklaces, earrings and bangles.



**Plate 27: Her Majesty Raja Isteri wearing *Baju Kebaya* at the Royal wedding in September 2004.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah)





**Plate 28:** The daughters of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam sitting in the front row, wearing *baju fesyen kurung moden*, at the Royal wedding.

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 29:** Female guests wearing *kain kapit* when attending vigil night ceremony at the royal wedding.

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department.)

For Muslims, headgear or the donning of the veil is an essential part of clothing, as the Islamic dress code requires women to cover the whole body, except for the face and hands. Muslim female clothing should conform to Islamic teaching. As stated in the Quran, Sura 24, verse 31.

And speak to the believing women that they refrain their eyes, and observe continence; and that they display not their ornaments, except those which are external; and that they throw their veils over their bosoms, and display not their ornaments, except to their husband or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male domestics who have no natural force, or to children who note not women's nakedness. And let them not strike their feet together, so as to discover their hidden ornaments. And be ye all turned to God, O ye Believers! that is may be well with you. (Translation of the Quran by Rodwell 2001: 232)

The verse is an inscription on women's bodies and their donning of the veil. Veiling is the religious injunction to cover up the entire body. Women are not allowed to expose parts of their body in public and to other men who are not immediate family members.

In former times, a *selayah*<sup>11</sup> or batik sarong was popularly worn as a head covering for outings and at ceremonial functions. Now, neither is in common use. Instead, a large or medium sized piece of square material is folded into a triangular shape and used as a headscarf, locally known as *tudung*. The material may be cotton, silk or synthetic, and of plain or printed design. For better presentation, plain headscarves embroidered with floral motifs and decorated with beads are worn.

In the past, *bunga cucuk sanggul* (head ornaments) were also worn, especially on festive and ceremonial occasions. The *bunga cucuk sanggul* were made of gold or silver and carved mostly with floral motifs. The hair was usually tied in a bun, with the *bunga cucuk sanggul* inserted into the bun. Fresh flowers were also used to decorate the coiffure. My Kedayan informant told me that according to their traditional custom, the way of decorating one's hair expressed the marital status of a woman. Placing the hair ornaments on the left side of the head signified the woman was single, whereas positing them on the right indicated that she was married. However, this practice is no longer observed. Now, other forms of head ornamentation, for example, hair bands, ribbons and

clips are also available. Furthermore, hats and sport caps may be worn depending on the occasion. At formal occasions, such as state functions, headscarves are commonly worn, even by non-Muslim women.

Western style clothing has also influenced female clothing. In the past, Western and masculines styles of clothing were not accepted for women. However, such perceptions have now long gone. For casual wear, T-shirt and trousers designed for women or skirts may be used, which are available in department stores. In addition, formal Western styles of clothing are also worn by some women working in the private sectors, in such internationally owned banks like Hongkong Shanghai Bank Corporation (HSBC) and Standard Chartered.



**Plate 30: Two types of Malay traditional dresses for females i.e. *baju kurung* (left) and *baju kebaya* (right).**

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah).

The introduction of British style administration in Brunei Darussalam provided opportunities for females to be employed in many government departments, including the army and police, but at that time the female uniform did not conform to Islamic dress codes as it exposed the female's upper arms and

lower legs. Now, although not all, many women's uniforms conform to the Islamic dress code. For example, the female police force and some platoons in the army have already adopted headscarf, trousers and long skirt for their uniform (see plate 31). Women working in jobs not requiring a uniform, particularly those working in the government sector, wear the traditional Malay costume of *baju kurung* and *kebaya* (see plate 30). This has become the national costume for women and must be worn when attending state and royal court functions. *Baju kurung* are also authorised as school uniforms, especially in the public schools (see plate 32).



**Plate 31: Women in the Royal Brunei Police Force.**

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah)





**Plate 32: Female students from one of the secondary schools participating in the procession during the National Day Anniversary.**  
(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

### **Factors Contributing to the Evolution and Transformation of Clothing.**

Bruneians are exposed to world fashion in many ways, so the variety of clothing they wear is greater than ever. External influences, such as foreign trade, Islamic preachers, political authority, as well as the explosion of technology, have exerted deep impacts upon many aspects of Bruneian life, including influencing the development and change of modes of attire. All of the influences have been selectively assimilated and combined to conform to local standards of dressing.

From the sixth century when Brunei was an entrepot for traders coming from Arabia, India and China, Bruneians have had access to imported goods, including cloths and clothing, through exchange with local products. Global commercial development has increased the variety of types of cloth and clothing imported to Brunei Darussalam. Now, not only clothes and clothing are imported from China and India, but also from other areas. Imported materials, such as French and Italian silks, as well as Malaysian batiks, are popular especially among female consumers, whereas plain materials imported from countries, such as Japan and Korea are common among males. These materials are being used to make national costumes.

Some traders in past centuries also preached the Islamic faith to the locals. Islam is believed to have come to Brunei during the tenth century, but it only began to be widely spread in the fifteenth century when the first Sultan of Brunei converted to Islam. Since then Islam has become a central identity marker. When Islam first came to Brunei, the locals were only exposed to the basic principles of the Islamic faith (*rukun Iman*)<sup>12</sup> and the five pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*)<sup>13</sup>. Once the teachings were more firmly entrenched, the practices and laws of Islam were implemented, but at first the Islamic code of dressing was only practised loosely. It was not until the mid-1980s, when Islam was re-emphasised and adopted as a basis for the national ideology that the Islamic code of dressing become more widely observed. For instance, the headscarf was prescribed as part of the formal dress for Muslim women. It should not be assumed that there has been no resistance to the fashion for covering up, even among the Muslim women as there are still some women not conforming to this imposition. Nevertheless, the visible emergence of the headscarf is considered as an affirmation of faith in moral and theological injunctions, as well as of compliance with the national ideology.

In the twentieth century, the style of dressing in Brunei Darussalam was influenced by both Western and regional fashion. From 1906, both Europeans and Malays from neighbouring states came to Brunei Darussalam to work as teachers, nurses, and administrators. The discovery of oil in 1929 opened up more opportunities for foreign experts and workers to come and work in Brunei Darussalam and has influenced Bruneian fashion and styles of clothing. Western-styled uniforms and clothing were adopted in the work place. For example, female nurses wore white short-sleeved shirts, short skirts and headgear similar to the uniform worn by nurses abroad, such as in Britain and Malaysia.

The exploration of oil has also transformed the economic situation, although full development was delayed until after the Second World War. Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien (1950-1967), the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan, had for the first time utilised Brunei's oil revenue to finance a Five-Year National Development Plan (1953-1958). Economic development, especially from oil industry revenue has been

utilised to develop the nation as a whole, providing opportunities to improve the well-being of the people. One of the emphases of the National Development Plan was given to the development of education. Apart from developing education institutions in the country, the people have also been given opportunities to study overseas, such as the U.K, Malaysia and Singapore. This has not only exposed them to foreign cultures, but also given them social mobility, especially for graduates from among the commoners. Upon completion of their studies, the graduates were guaranteed jobs in government departments with high positions, thus conferring upon them higher social and political status. Such status has evidently been manifested through adapting Western styles of attire, but these highly educated commoners have also been honoured with the 'uniform' of ceremonial dress to wear in the royal court. In addition, economic development has also provided financial stability among the Bruneians and increased their ability to purchase available clothing in the market. Furthermore, especially after World War II, there was an increase in the availability and types of clothes on the market for the Bruneians to choose from; modern clothing was being adopted widely, even among those who lived in rural areas. As a consequence, questions of identity became more complex (Howard 2000). During my fieldwork at the rural areas, I observed that the people there have adopted modern clothing, such as T-shirts, jeans, trousers and shorts for everyday wear. My informant told me the wearing of ethnic traditional costume is limited to ceremonial and special occasions, such as weddings and cultural performance.

The explosion of media technology in which more global information can be transmitted through electronic and printed media, such as television, cinemas, computer and internet facilities, magazines and newspapers has provided Bruneians with more direct exposure to what happens around the world. Apart from the current issues, Bruneians have also been opened to the designs of up-to-date fashion. Such exposure has generated an interest to possess and imitate selective up-to-date trends, designs and styles of clothing that conform to the standard of local values. Now, not only Western styles of clothing are adapted by the Bruneians, but other fashions from other areas are also influencing clothing in

Brunei Darussalam. For instance, international designer- labelled or 'branded' casual and formal clothes, such as those from Calvin Klein, Gianni Versace, Giorgio Armani, Christian Dior and Guess, which are either on sale in the department stores in Brunei Darussalam or abroad, are purchased by Bruneian consumers. Bollywood films have gaining in popularity in Brunei Darussalam since the late 1990s, and certain clothes worn by their actors are being imitated and worn by the Bruneian fans.

It has been accepted that Brunei Darussalam, like the rest of the world, inevitably is open to globalisation and its impact socially, politically, culturally and economically. Globalisation theory allows for the possibility of globalisation's impact upon ethnic identity as well as a strengthening of national identity as a reaction or resistance to globalisation (Cibulka 2000). The national philosophy, Malay Islamic Monarchy, has been adopted as a measure to filter external influences that are considered unsuitable according to the national values. Brunei Darussalam has made this ideology a national aspiration, inculcating it as a way of life, as well as a national identity. This ideology has thus played a role in the development and change of mode of clothing among Bruneians of different ethnic backgrounds. The acceptance of traditional Malay attire as a national dress, especially worn during certain state and royal court functions, is one way of manifesting national identity through dressing. However, the re-emergence of ethnic traditional clothes has concurrently been encouraged especially for special occasions, such as during cultural performance, in a way that has allowed them to associate with ethnic identities. It is intended that local cultural expression is orderly manifested and in accordance with the national ideology, Malay Islamic Monarchy.

### **Conclusion.**

To recapitulate, I have shown that modes of clothing in Brunei Darussalam have been developing and changing. In this chapter, I show how globalisation has played a significant role in contributing to such processes. Clothing, by way of certain patterns, designs, colours and additional accessories,

has, to some extent, facilitated identification of the wearer. However, the cultural flow in response to the process of globalisation has simultaneously exposed Bruneians to diverse influences, thus providing complexity in the questions of identity.

Globalisation has instigated the awareness to strengthen national or local identities. The adoption of the national ideology of Malay Islamic Monarchy can be seen as a reaction to globalisation and the need to maintain and strengthen national and local identities. It is also used as a measure to filter external influences. Both globalisation and the adoption of national ideology concurrently lead to similar results, i.e. cultural homogenisation. However, the government's propagation in prescribing national costume at formal and public functions, as well as promoting ethnic traditional costumes is derived from the national as well as local values and identities. Now, as the awareness of 'Malay identity' as the national identity amongst the ethnic groups (especially among the seven ethnic groups that are legitimately recognised as the Malay 'race' in the Brunei Constitution) has increased, ethnic dress has been constantly used to display ethnicity not only during ethnic celebrations, but significantly during events at national or state level, such as the National Day and the Sultan's birthday celebrations. This propagation suggests the government's effort in inculcating the national and local values and identities by way of clothing as part of the nation-building project.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Majority of them have now converted to Islam.

<sup>2</sup> The name was taken after the name of the tree used to make the clothes i.e. *artocarpus elasticus* tree. The jackets are produced by Murut men. When I did my research, I had the opportunity to see the process of producing bark cloths.

<sup>3</sup> Further discussion in Chapter Six

<sup>4</sup> According to Islamic rules, man is prohibited wearing silk taken from the silkworm, as such silk is exclusively for women; however, artificial silk is not included in the prohibition

<sup>5</sup> The notion of decency in the mode of dressing for men according to Islamic teaching is basically to cover one's body between above the navel until below the knees. However, it is appropriate to cover the whole body. The usage of headgear is commended, although such an act is not obligatory.

<sup>6</sup> The highest religious official in Brunei Darussalam.

<sup>7</sup> A process in which Malay cultural characteristics are rigorously adopted, especially in relation to the declaration of national philosophy.

<sup>8</sup> At the time Haji Sumadi bin Haji Sukaimi was the Special Officer at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. He was also the President of the Brunei Youth Council (*Majlis Belia Brunei*). Currently, he holds position as acting Director at the Language and Literature Bureau, Ministry of Culture, Youth and a Sport, Brunei Darussalam.

<sup>9</sup> His title is Duli Yang Teramat Mulia Paduka Seri Pengiran Digadong Sahibul Mal – the third vizier.

<sup>10</sup> In other region in the Malay Archipelago, a *selendang* is a long rectangular cloth and commonly used as headscarf or worn like a sash over the women's shoulder and is also used to carry infants. However, in Brunei, *selendang* is a batik tubular cloth and generally used as skirt, which is worn as daily clothing especially among women.

<sup>11</sup> *Selayah* is the term employed in Brunei to label what elsewhere in the archipelago is called a *selendang*.

<sup>12</sup> There are six basic principles of faith in Islam, i.e. to believe in God (Allah), believe in Angels, believe in Prophets and Messengers of God, believe in holy books revealed to Prophet Muhammad (the Koran), Prophet Isa (Jesus – the Bible), Prophet Musa (Moses – the Pentateuch) and Prophet Daud (David – the Psalms), believe in the Day of Judgement and to believe in God's decree and destiny.

<sup>13</sup> The five pillars of Islam are to confess that there is no divinity other than God (Allah) and Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God, to perform obligatory prayers five times a day, to fast during the whole month of Ramadhan, to pay *zakat* (tithe due on the wealth of the rich according to Islamic law), and to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a life time if one can afford it physically and financially.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Traditional Woven Textiles: Production, Layout and Islamic Influence.**

#### **Introduction.**

Brunei Darussalam is one of the Malay states in Southeast Asia region that produces fine quality woven textiles. Weaving in Brunei Darussalam has always been women's activity; however, the implements are ordinarily made by men. Bruneian weavers continue today to use traditional, non-machine operated looms. The traditionally woven textiles, locally known as *kain tenunan*, are admired for not only for their beautiful, colourful and rich appearance, but also because of their intricacy of their production as well as for their fine quality.

This chapter provides a history of these traditional textiles. The layout of the cloths will be examined to provide a clear picture of how they are composed. I will discuss the source, symbolism of the motifs used in decorating the cloths and the types and designs of traditional woven textiles, the factors that contribute to the recreation of designs of the traditional woven textiles in Brunei Darussalam will also be examined.

#### **Early Literature on the Production of Traditional Woven Textiles.**

There have been substantial academic studies of textiles in Southeast Asia, including of the Malay world (see Howard 1994). However, little attention has been paid to Brunei Darussalam. Therefore, this study relies on early writings on the region. Norwani (1987) and Selvanayagam (1990) focus their study on the production of *songket* in Malaysia. The studies complement each other; areas which are not treated in depth in Norwani's study are covered by Selvanayagam. While Norwani concentrates her discussion on weaving method and techniques, Selvanayagam focuses her discussion on the designs and patterns used in Malaysian *songket*. However, both studies only touch briefly on the uses of *songket*. Siti Zainon (1997) looks into various types of textiles produced in the Malay world. Siti Zainon uses the word 'Malay world' to cover a whole geographical area of related cultural traits with common textile practice. She

emphasises that the various types of textiles worn throughout the region indicate a common cultural identity. I conducted one of the few studies on the production of traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam for my own MA dissertation (Siti Norkhalbi 1999). The study concentrates on the identification of the technology employed, the weaving process and various types of motifs and designs commonly used in Brunei Darussalam.

*Songket* weaving in Lombok, Indonesia is documented by the Indonesian Department of National Education (Usri Indah, et al. 2000). This book discusses the weaving background, weaving process and different types of designs and motifs used in Lombok. In her Ph.D. research, Ng (1987) studied the use of locally woven supplementary weft cloths in Minangkabau, Indonesia. In chapter six of her thesis, Ng analyses the classification of the cloths and examines the layout, motifs and colour schemes, as well as the uses of the textiles as ceremonial clothing and their relation to social organisation of Minangkabau women. Morrell (1997) also for her Ph.D. research studied material culture in South Sulawesi, Indonesia in which she focused on textile and woodcarving. In this study she examines the multiple roles of material culture in mediating social change. With the exception of Ng's research, these works largely focus on the production of woven textiles. Although there are attempts to discuss aspects such as the historical background, uses, patterns and symbolism of the traditional textiles, they are only brief and not treated as the focus of discussion.

Except for Morrell (1997), these earlier studies of textiles, (Norwani 1989; Selvanayagam 1990; Siti Norkhalbi 1999; Siti Zainon 1997), have not examined Islamic influence in the designing and patterning of the textiles in depth. According to Ng (1987), in the case of Minangkabau, although they are Muslims, Islam has not exerted much impact on the creation of motifs for ceremonial cloths. She argues that the Minangkabau people treat Islam as a separate element to their *adat* as indicated by the use of animal motifs in their ceremonial cloths. Morrell's research is conceivably the most significant as she ventures into the Islamic influence in the production of textiles among the Bugis. Islam has



become the marker of identity for the Bugis; it thus plays a significant role in shaping their belief and practices (Morrell 1997).

### **Historical background.**

The exact date when woven textiles came into existence in Brunei is not known. An archaeological team led by Tom Harrisons in 1952-1953, conducting excavations in Kota Batu, revealed 17 pieces of weaving implements, including a cloth beam, parts of a weaving loom, and a container for dying cloths.

Radiocarbon dating analysis conducted on the implements had shown they could be dated between 800 and 1850 (Pengiran Karim 2002). Another excavation at Kampong Limau Manis in Brunei Muara district conducted in October 2002 also discovered weaving implements (Pengiran Karim 2003). These findings indicate the long existence of weaving tradition in Brunei Darussalam.

Other records (Mohd Jamil 2005:5) indicate that weaving may have been practised as early as the sixth century. Records show that Poli (the old name of Brunei) had sent a mission to the Chinese Dynasty of Liang (502-566 A.D) with tribute including 'golden mats' (Mohd Jamil 2000:5). The 'golden mat' may refer to the large, ornate and intricately woven cloth that was commonly used as a seating mat, for royalty, and at weddings<sup>1</sup>.

The Chinese traveller, Chau Jua Kua in 1225 AD noted that in Brunei 'the wives and daughters in rich families wore sarongs of brocades and melted gold [sic] coloured silk' (Mohd Jamil 2000:10). Records also show that during the reign of Emperor Yung Lo (1402-1424), a Brunei envoy sent to China to pay homage in 1407 brought gifts from among the native products of Brunei, including gemstones, pearls, various cloths and incense (Mohd Jamil 2000).

The Portuguese traveller Antonia Pigafetta, who visited Brunei in 1521, noted the use of traditional textiles as curtains and for clothes worn by the men in the Brunei court. At the time, the elaborate usage of brocaded textiles indicated the status of the wearer in the country. In addition, textiles were also used as gifts for foreign guests and were seen as a significant factor in establishing and strengthening the relationship between the two parties.

According to one legend that relates to textile weaving, before he converted to Islam, the King of Brunei, Awang Alak Betatar, who ruled Brunei in the twelfth century, was engaged in cock fighting with the ruler of Majapahit. As a wager, the King of Majapahit was to present his ship and its entire contents if he lost to the King of Brunei. On the other hand, if the King of Brunei lost, then he would have to place Brunei under the dominance of Majapahit. In the event, the King of Majapahit lost and he had to give up his ship and its entire contents to the King of Brunei. According to the myth, among the content of the ship, there were forty craftsmen, including brass casters, goldsmiths, silver smiths and brocade weavers (Abd Latif 1985).

Brunei Darussalam does not produce raw materials for weaving. It is believed that weaving had its starting point when Chinese travellers came to Brunei and brought with them gold, silver and silk in exchange for local goods, such as camphor and spices (Pengiran Ismail 1997). As well as being the old capital of Brunei, Kampong Ayer also became the centre of trade from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Chi, Cleary and Kam 1996). Kampong Ayer was noted as a major trading city, with the wharves and warehouses of the Kampong at its economic heart. It was perhaps the location of these villages, which were accessible to the entrepot that enabled the weavers to get their supplies of raw materials.

There were four villages which were closely associated with cloth weaving in the past. There are Kampong Bukit Salat, Kampong Sungai Kedayan, Kampong Burong Pingai and Kampong Lurong Sikuna. Two of my weaving informants originally came from Kampong Sungai Kedayan and Kampong Lurong Sikuna. When I did my MA research, I conducted my observations at a weaving workshop in Kampong Burong Pingai. I did not do any research in Kampong Bukit Salat, but one of my informants mentioned to me that he used to get his supplies of woven cloths from the weavers in this village. Now, many of the weavers have moved to the mainland. Some have followed their husbands or their siblings. As a result, their location has scattered, especially in the Brunei Muara district.

Traditionally, the production of traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam was dominated by Brunei Malay high non-noble women from several villages in Kampong Ayer (Brown 1970). In the early Kingdom, Kampong Ayer was originally the capital and the centre of government. The villages occupied by the nobles were centred on the capital, where the ruler usually resided. The high non-nobles also lived around the upstream half of the capital, as they were occupationally specialized in administrative tasks, in trade, fine metal works and cloth weaving, crafts that were usually under royal patronage (Abd Latif 1985, Brown 1970).

### **The Notion of Aesthetic Representation.**

The integration of skill and creativity in the production of traditional textile forms an expressive measure of aesthetic standard. In Brunei Malay, there are many words used to express the concept of beauty that is linked to textiles. *Halus* (fine), *bisai* (nice), *lawa* (beautiful), *rata* (consistent), *timbul* (bold) and *rapat* (tight), are used in contrast to words like *kasar* (coarse) and *landir* (loose) that are used to convey bad quality. The composition and structure of motifs in textile's design is an important attribute of its aesthetic representation. The coherence and integration of motifs of the patterns and colour schemes, the quality of the weaving and the layout of the fabric, all contribute to the aesthetics of the woven textiles. The coherence and integration in the arrangement of motifs is described as *rata* (consistent) in Brunei Malay.

Colour is an important feature in the consideration of the notion of aesthetics of traditional textiles. Abundant use is made of golden or metallic threads, but cotton and silk in plain colours also are used for the background. In Brunei, bright colours have been commonly used, but, pastel colours are now gaining popularity. Multiple colours of cotton, silk and metallic threads are also used for motifs. The word *timbul* is usually used to express the bright colours of the threads which form the motifs that stand out at the surface of the fabric.

Apart from the arrangement of pattern and motifs, as well as combination of colours; the aesthetic standard of traditional woven cloths is measured by the smoothness of the fabric. The threads which form the fabric need to be closely and tightly woven to give an even surface, thus smooth appearance. The words *halus* (fine) and *rapat* (tight) are usually used to express such quality. In order to have this fine outcome, a weaver needs not only to be skilled, but diligent in carrying out the intricate task.

### **The Composition and Structure of Design.**

The ornamental features, such as the *punca* (centre), *tepi* (border) and *badan* (body) of woven textile are usually composed and structured according to the purpose for which the fabric is made for. They are strategically composed and structured to enhance the aesthetic quality of the fabric.

#### Textiles for Ceremonial Clothing.

Full ceremonial dress for a male consists of a long-sleeved tunic (*baju*) (see plate 33), a pair of trousers (*seluar*) (see plate 35), a short sarong (*sinjang*), specially folded headdress (*dastar*), belt (*arat*) and sash (*sesandang*). The female wears *baju kebaya* or *baju kurung* for the top (see plate 34), a sarong (see plate 36) and sash. The textile designed for the set of costume is usually the same colour, motif and pattern. There is only one pattern or design used to adorn each costume. The identical pattern gives the costume set a consistent and uniform appearance.



**Plate 33: Male tunic**



**Plate 34: Female top**



**Plate 35: Trousers for male**



**Plate 36: Skirt for female**

(Photos: Courtesy of Hajah Azimah Pehin Dato Haji Yaakub)

### The Layout of *Sinjang* and *Sarong*.

The length of *sarong* is longer compared to *sinjang*, but the structure of the two is identical. The standard size of a piece of *sinjang* is 2.2 metres by 0.8 metre. The *sarong* and *sinjang* are composed of three distinct structural areas. These are the borders (*tepi kain*) that are located horizontally at both edges of the

fabric; the centre (*punca*) which is a decorative panel at the centre of the cloth; and the body (*badan*) which occupies the rest of the cloth (see plate 37).



**Plate 37: Layout of a standard *sinjang* or sarong**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

*Tepi Kain* (Border).

The *tepi kain* is located at the length of both edges at the upper and lower parts of the fabric – the warp length. The ‘whole’ border has three parts. The central part is usually about four inches or 8 cm wide; however, this may vary according to individual preference. On both sides of the central part, two narrow identical lines (*apit*) about an inch or two centimetres wide are woven. The central part of the border may be decorated either with arabesques or geometrical motifs or combinations of both. Triangular and rhomboid geometrical motifs are the most common motifs used to decorate the borders although an ‘S’ or smaller geometrical motifs may also be used to adorn the *apit*.

*Punca* (The Center).

Constituting the most distinctive part, the *punca*, is the central panel and is decorated with a distinguishing pattern. The most common motif used is the *pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoot), triangular motifs which are placed side by side and close together. In between the spaces, the weavers usually place elongated rhomboid shapes and scattered floral or geometrical motifs. Interlaced floral and geometrical motifs are also used to decorate the vertical and horizontal lines

within the *punca*. Narrow bands (*lapik punca*) which are about three centimetres wide are decorated with a horizontal pattern that is woven across the width of the kain.

*Badan (Body).*

The body (*badan*) of the *kain* is also known as the *tanah* (ground). It is patterned with geometric or floral motifs and decorated with either full, scattered or styled arrangement patterns. There are various types of designs that can be chosen to adorn the body. I will elaborate on the different types of designs used in Brunei Darussalam at a later stage of this chapter.

Headdress (*Dastar*)

The cloth woven to produce a headdress is a square of about a metre in size (see plate 38). It consists of *tepi* (border) and the *punca* (centre-field). The borders of the head cloth run along all four outer edges. The border's pattern is usually similar to the border of the *kain* and the square centre-field decoration of the head cloth usually matches the pattern used for the body or *tanah* of the *kain*.



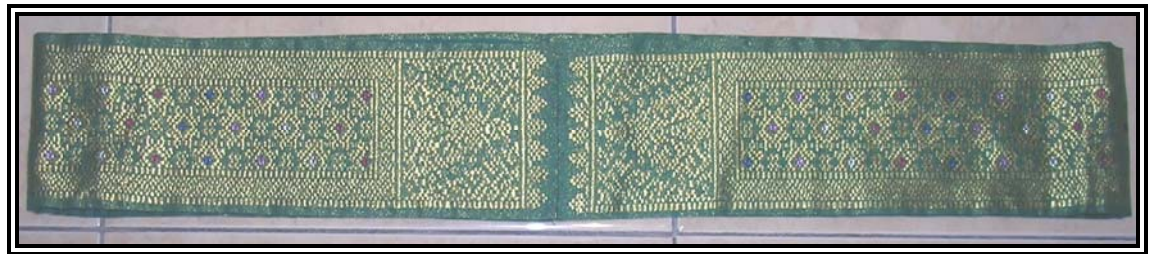
**Plate 38: Fabric for headgear.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Hajah Azimah PD Haji Yaakub).



### Belt (*Arat*)

The belt or *arat* is a stiff long rectangular piece of woven fabric about ten centimetres broad and worn around the waist over the top of the male *sinjang* (see plate 39). The length depends on the waist of the wearer. The belt is usually decorated with the same pattern or motif as the body of the *sinjang*. The belt is divided into three parts: main, end and the borders. The main part of the *arat* which is between the ends is usually decorated with the same pattern as the main set of the clothing and framed with small borders around the main pattern of the body. Each of the ends is about ten centimetres long and usually decorated with *pucuk rebung* or a triangular motif.



**Plate 39: Belt/ sash.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Hajah Azimah PD Haji Yaakub).

### Sash (*Sesandang*)

The sash or *sesandang* is also a rectangular woven cloth that is similar to the *arat*, but longer and broader in size. The sash is of matching colour and design to the rest of the set. It is usually slung over a shoulder to fall diagonally across the upper body.

### Textiles for other items.

Now, traditional textiles or *kain tenunan* have been diversified. The production of such textiles is no longer limited for the purpose of clothing, but has evolved into other marketable items. Many of the products are tailored as functional items, as well as for furnishing. Hence, more items are created from the textiles, such as pen stands, folder covers and many more. However, the patterns and motifs derived from floral and geometrical shapes continue to be



used in the decoration of the fabric. Cloths woven for items, such as handbags, purses, shoes, ties and mats are usually similar to the *baju*. However, borders are sometimes added, depending on the preference of the weavers or the person who commissioned the items.

#### Ornamental Mat.

The structure of an ornamental mat is usually similar to the head-cloth, but it is much bigger in size. The mat is padded with thick foam or cotton for comfort, and the base is covered with satin. Now, it is common to see these mats covered with transparent durable plastic to ensure the fabric of the ornamental mat lasts longer.

#### Decorative Items.

Woven cloths are also used for decorative furnishing, such as bed spreads, pillow covers, table mats and runners, and tray cloths. Pillow covers are both square and rectangular. The square pillows are usually used for furnishings, whereas the rectangular ones are used for ceremonial occasions. The layout of the motifs for both pillow covers is similar. The edges are decorated with a geometric motif. The motif in the centre is either geometrical or floral motif. Matching coloured cotton or satin is usually used for the base of the pillow. The motif layout of the table mats and runners is similar to the pillow and is dependent on preference of those who commissioned them or the weavers.



**Plate 40: Cloth made into functional items.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

### **The Sources and Symbolism of the Motifs and Design.**

The need to beautify things is not an unusual phenomenon perhaps as it is part of human nature. From my observations, many of the motifs used to decorate the *songket* of Malaysia and Indonesia are found in *kain tenunan Brunei* although there are also certain motifs unique to Brunei Darussalam, such as *bunga putar* (rotating floral motif), thus perhaps patterns and designs may have been influenced both by foreign and local elements. In addition, Malaysian *songket*, Lombok's *songket* and *kain tenunan Brunei* are similar in terms of the techniques used to weave them, their designs and the use of the textiles in the society. However, there are also distinctive characteristics that differentiate the textiles produced in these areas. For instance, the distinction may be traced through the different names or terminology used. Furthermore, *kain tenunan Brunei* has never employed figurative human motif. The similarities in usage, designs, pattern, and weaving technique across the region may have been due to cultural flows (Appadurai 1996a). These have exposed Brunei culture to foreign ideas, materials and designs. Brunei Darussalam was once an entrepot and an important international crossroads between global centres of population and trade (Chi,

Cleary and Kam 1996). Traders brought along with them commodities for new markets. Political envoys exchanged gifts to establish political ties. There were also those who migrated to Brunei from their homelands, such as Indonesia, the Middle East and China, and it was not surprising for them to bring with them their practices and material culture. Furthermore, many of the commodities that had been exchanged in the market were used by the locals and adopted as their own.

Another factor that contributed to the similarity of the design, patterns and motifs is the fact that such resemblances are not seen as duplication, but perceived as the evolution and innovation of creativity. The ability of designers and weavers to adopt and modify the 'original' design and motifs into 'different' versions enhances the decorative ideas and techniques. The expression may vary in accordance with the influences of the surroundings and religious belief. However, the end product not only is satisfying from an aesthetic point of view, but also from that of spiritual aims (Burckhardt 1976; Metusin 1995).

In Brunei Darussalam, the 'ecological context' (Lamberg Karlovsky 1993:273) or natural local environment of the weavers has played an important part in inspiring the creation of new patterns and motifs used in traditional textiles. The scenery, plants, animals<sup>2</sup> and other elements of nature have all been adopted into the designs.

The motifs, which may have a symbolic meaning, used in Brunei traditional cloths enliven the appearance of the fabric and increase their value (Maxwell 1990). Certain motifs are used to distinguish social and political rank. It is often difficult, however, to determine the meaning of symbols as not all weavers are aware of them. Many weavers intend to accept and follow designs handed down by their teachers. Others give certain meaning to their own creations. Furthermore, while there are certain motifs that have culturally shared meaning, it is not uncommon for similar motifs to be interpreted differently. Islamic principles have always played an important role in influencing motifs among Muslim artists to beautify as this is in conformity with Islamic teaching and is strengthened and supported by the saying of the Prophet, 'God is beautiful and He loves beauty' (Burckhardt 1967:161). Within the spiritual universe of

Islam, symbolism is a dimension that is used as a catalyst for contemplation directed towards the presence of Allah and the unity of the universe (Mohammed Sharif 2001).

In the early times, the animal motifs in crafts were seen in Brunei. However, once the Islamic influence became stronger, motifs that portrayed animals were abandoned, among the Muslim craftsmen. Islam has been a strong influence upon the imagery and production not only in traditional textiles, but generally in Brunei's arts and architecture. The concept of art in Islam encourages the expression of beautiful visuals, but they must also be bound by the fundamental faith system of Islam based on the belief that 'There is no Divinity other than Allah' (Mohammed Sharif 2001). Islam forbids creations resembling human beings and animals in its visual art. The prohibition of employing such images in Islam is on the basis that it could lead to idolatry. However, designers still use animals as inspiration for motifs, by taking some part of the body such as the wings, scales or elbows of the animal and adaptation of their shape. As long as the motif does not display the exact figure of the animal, it is tolerated. The designer may also modify such a motif to conform to Islamic values. Examples of animal motifs that have been adapted in weaving motifs are *sisik tenggiling* (the scale of scaly ant-eater) and *siku keluang* (the elbow of the flying-fox).

Although Islam forbids the use of human and animal images in the creation of arts, floral and geometric motifs are acceptable. Connors (1996:25) suggests that geometric designs, such as the hook and rhomb, were ascribed to the Dong Son culture. The patterns used in Brunei are also widely used among other Malay peoples in the region and many of these can be traced to Dong Son culture. However, there are also some instances where patterns were adopted from Moslem sources. Although it can be argued that the continued use of such patterns was inspired by Dong Son culture, the prohibition use of human and animal images in the Islamic faith to certain extent has promote the widespread and enduring use of geometric and floral motifs as they conform to the religion's aesthetic requirement (Morrell 1997). The use of these motifs is a visual analogy to the religious rules of behaviour by Muslims.

Flowers and fruits, such as *teratai* (lotus or water lily), *bunga matahari* (sun flowers), *bunga melur* (jasmine), *bunga keramunting* (rose myrtle); and fruits, such as *buah manggis* (mangosteen), *buah nonah* (custard-apple), and *buah pedada* (fruits of seaside tree, sp. *sonneratia acida*), are popular motifs that have been incorporated into weaving designs. Motifs inspired by parts of fruits or flowers, such as the stalk, seed, skin and calyx are also used (Siti Norkhalbi 1999). Such motifs are *biji buah timun* (cucumber's seeds), *seri kelapa* (coconut's shoot), *tampok manggis* (a stalk of mangosteen), and many others. *Pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoot) motif inspired by the triangular-shaped shoot of a giant bamboo is commonly used to decorate the centre of woven cloth. This motif is also commonly found in fabrics produced in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The use of vegetal ornaments or arabesques, which are characterised by a continuous stem that splits regularly, producing a series of counterpoised, leafy, secondary stems that in turn split or return to be reintegrated into the main stem, are commonly used in designing the borders of the traditional cloths. The arabesque has two basic elements, the interlacement derivative of geometrical and plant motifs, which represents a sort of graphic formulation of rhythm, expressed in spiraloid designs. According to my informants, the motifs are believed to be inspired by both the plants and waves of the sea or river. Specific names are given to motifs depending on their composition. An example of vegetal arabesque is the vine-like (*daun menjalar*) motifs of interlacing leaf scrolls and branches winding back on themselves that are stylized in an undulating and spiraloid form (Bantong 1989). Another example is the continuous series of spirals twining and untwining like waves on the sea that is locally known as *air mulih* (Metusin 1985; Masnah 1996) (see plate 41). These motifs are commonly found on the upper and lower parts of the horizontal borders and on the vertical decoration on either side of the centre of traditional cloths. The shapes, which move smoothly and constantly in one direction, have been interpreted by the designers as coming back to its roots and according to them, as Muslims, we are urged to go back to the root of our existence according to Islamic teaching. Such

designs connote a conscious return towards the fundamental teaching of Islam as the primordial religion [*din al-fitrah*] (Burckhardt 1967:109).



**Plate 41: *Air mulih* motif.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

Other natural features, such as the rain, clouds and water, also inspire traditional motifs. Motifs, such as *awan berlari* motif (running or trailing clouds) depicted by the 'S' shaped pattern which often decorates the *apit* or vertical design of the fabric symbolises the continuity of existence (Metussin 1995).

Geometric motifs are popular among Islamic artists and designers in all parts of the Muslim world and the spread of Islam has extended the influence of such motifs. In Brunei Darussalam, geometrical motifs such as the circle, rhombus, triangle, square and hexagon, are combined, duplicated, interlaced and arranged in intricate combinations. In conformity with the Islamic teachings which insist that its followers act in balanced fashion in order to gain blessings from Allah, the symmetry of the motifs symbolises balance. Furthermore, the composition of the geometrical forms and the absence of figurative images have proved that there is no obstacle to artistic fertility which expresses a creative joy (Burckhardt 1967: 104).

Critchlow (1976) suggests that all Islamic geometrical patterns originate from the circle and its centre which is an apt symbol of a religion that emphasises one God. It also connotes unity. In Malay, circle means '*bulat*' and expressions derived from such word such as *sebulat suara* (one voice) and *sebulat hati* (one heart) are common to express unity. In Islam, great unity is reflected in facing Mecca where the Kaaba is located which all Muslims face in prayer (Morrell 1997). The circle has always been regarded as a symbol of eternity, without

beginning and without end. It is also the perfect expression of justice and equality (Critchlow 1976).

Arabic calligraphy has also influenced the design of the traditional Bruneian woven cloths, especially those used for gifts and souvenirs. Other artefacts, such as the cooking pot and the *saujudah* (a special type of decorated curtain which is used for the bride and groom's bed) use Arabic script to decorate the items or for protective purposes. For instance, in the decorations for *saujudah*, certain verses from the Quran are used for the purpose of protecting the wedded couple from unwanted omens or evil spirits (Safariah 1979, in Metussin 1994:38). One of the most popular verses used for such decoration is the basic proclamation of the Islamic faith, *Laillahaillallah Muhammaddarasulullah* (there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God). When verses from the Quran are used to decorate such artefacts, they must be placed carefully so as to respect the sacred verses. Therefore, it is common to see artefacts with sacred verses on them in high or protected areas such as, on a wall or displayed on shelves.

The verse *Innallazi Fardha alaikal Quraanalaraddhuka illa ma'ad*, (He who hath sanctioned the Quran to thee will certainly bring thee to thy home) (The Quran sura 28 – The story: verse 85) is a common verse from the Quran used for wall hangings. The verse is commonly recited when travelling on a long journey, such as performing the Hajj. Another commonly used verse from the Quran is the *ayatul kursi*. The verse is recited after daily prayer to ask for God's protection. Such quotations must be placed at well respected location due to the highest degree.

God! There is no God but He; the Living, the Eternal; Nor slumber seize Him, nor sleep; His, whatsoever is in the Heavens and whatsoever is in the Earth! Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His own permission? He knows what hath been before them and what shall they grasp, save what he will. His Throne reaches over the Heavens and the Earth, and the upholding of both burdens Him not; and He is the High, the Great (Translation of the Quran Sura 2 -The Cow: verse 255).

Greetings such as *Terima Kasih* (thank you) and *Selamat Datang ke Negara Brunei Darussalam* (welcome to Brunei Darussalam), and other personalised greetings are commonly woven in Arabic or Roman script for souvenirs and gifts.

In former times, Quranic verses were written on jackets used during war or when people were assigned a dangerous and difficult task. It was believed that the verses acted as a blessing and protection from Allah, so as the person who wore the jacket would not be harmed (Metussin 1995: 38). Perhaps now due to a better understanding of the adoption of Quranic verses as decoration, especially for functional items, such as clothing, it is now not common to see such verses used<sup>3</sup>.

The geometric shapes of Malay cakes and biscuits, such as *jit manis* (sweet biscuit) and *ardam* (deep-fried biscuit) also inspires the weavers. According to my informant, the arrangement of these cakes and biscuits on the plates that are served during festivals or when guests come for visits also inspires weavers. Similarly, the shapes of spices used in cooking, such as *cengkih* (clove-spice) and *bunga lawang* (star aniseed), have been adopted into textile design. It appears because weaving activities were originally done in the weaver's home; it is not surprising that activities and objects related to household chores have made their way into cloth designs.

The palace has been another source of inspiration for weavers. Legends of the superiority of kings and nobles are feasibly accepted as symbols of sovereignty, bravery and fame. In addition, the palace is perceived not only as the centre of ruling power, but also the centre of cultural and religious development. Therefore, terminologies linked to the monarchy inspire designers and weavers to use them in their creations. Motif names like *tepi dastar Pengiran Muda Marak Berapi* (the border of Prince Flaring Flame's headdress) and *punca puncak mahligai* (the centre at the peak of the palace) are a few examples. My informants told me the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien was a passionate artist and had created motifs and designs which were adopted not only in textiles, but also in Brunei's architecture. The royal family have also been



known as patrons who ensure the continuity of both production and consumption of traditional woven textiles and have thus catalysed the adoption of terminologies and titles related to the palace to name certain motifs. Perhaps the superiority and resplendence of the monarch has been inspiring to weavers, and this is manifested in their creations.

The environment and Islamic beliefs have influenced the creation and naming of motifs. Both elements are significant in influencing the creativity of artists and their incorporation into the motifs indicates the weavers' affection for their surroundings and the spiritual value that expresses the greatness of Allah, as well as obedience to Him.

### **Types, Patterns and Designs of Traditional Woven Textiles.**

In this section, I will explain different types of traditional textiles. I will also elaborate on the different patterns and designs of traditional textiles produced in Brunei Darussalam. Traditional textiles can be identified through the type, pattern or design of the material.

#### Types of Textiles.

Locally woven traditional textiles can be divided into two types: *kain tenunan biasa* ('ordinary woven cloth') and *kain bepakan* (fabric with glossy appearance). In *kain tenunan biasa* either cotton or silk yarn is used for the background of the material and the warp and weft. Gold, silver or metallic and different coloured threads are only used for the motifs. The background of *kain tenunan biasa* has a matt finish. In *kain bepakan* cotton or silk yarns are used as the warp and the weft. However, additional gold, silver or metallic threads are woven alternately between the cotton or silk threads on the weft, thus giving the fabric its shimmering or glossy appearance.

#### Patterns and Designs of Traditional Cloths.

Pattern is a matter of how the individual motifs are arranged on the cloth, whether randomly scattered on the cloth or in an interlocking fashion that strictly determines where the individual motifs are located. In contrast, design refers to the internal relationship of empty (plain) and filled areas and the aesthetic effect

of how such elements as geometric shapes (e.g. rhomboid, triangles) and floral decorations are combined. Pattern thus deals with physical integration of motifs of the cloth, while design refers to the aesthetic integration of motifs and other elements. Pattern sets the physical parameters for the decoration of cloth, whereas design refers to the variations of how different elements are combined to produce a stylistic effect. To some degree, it is the contrast of structure and content.

Usually the designers and weavers give name to their creations according to the type, pattern, design or motifs used to decorate the fabric. In addition, certain designs might also get their names because the designer or weaver likes certain terms that sounds congenial, thus adopting them so as to identify them. According to my informant, terms such as *cantik manis* (beauty sweet), *kaca permata* (glass gem) and *kaca warna* (glass colour) are used to name the designs because they sound pleasant. Indeed, they are in native language although to me it seems hard to make sense of them, especially in my attempt to translate them in English.

One of my designer informants told me that many of her design names were based on stories she had read when she was young. The story that inspired her to name her design *Si Lubang Bangsi* is from tales of *Surat-Surat Baginda* (Tales of the Ruler's Letters). The story was summarised by the designer as follows<sup>4</sup>:

Once upon a time, there was a Sultan named Sultan Dewa who reigned on earth. He was looking for the perfect woman for his Queen. He vowed to his parents that he would marry the woman who messed up the royal park in his palace.

One night, there was a beautiful Princess from fairyland named Dang Rukam, who was sent down by her father to earth. She was engaged to her cousin, but he cheated on her. She was hurt and ashamed of being jilted by her fiancé. To escape from shame, her father sent her away. When she had descended to the earth, she landed at the palace's park. When she landed, she ruined the royal park. Before she left, she asked her father for a magical black body suit for her disguise.

Remembering his vow, when the Sultan Dewa heard that there was a woman who had messed up his park, he went to see her. But he was disappointed to see that the woman was not what he expected. He was hoping to meet a beautiful woman, but because of the magical black body suit the Princess wore as her disguise, she had turned black. However, the Sultan had to fulfil his promise to marry her. He tried to find an excuse to avoid marrying the Princess. So, he asked the Princess to weave a piece of *kain kesaktian* or magical cloth. The cloth must be 'as big as the *alam* (whole universe) when unfolded, but must be as small as the *bangsi* (harmonica) when folded'. If she failed to weave the cloth, she would be condemned to death.

The Sultan's mother took pity on the princess and took her under her wing. The Princess did not know how to weave, but the Sultan's mother told her how to do it because she was afraid that the princess would be killed. So, the Princess tried her best to weave, and she wept while weaving. According to the legend, the pattern for the cloth was guided by a magical housefly. The Princess followed wherever the magical housefly flew to create the pattern.

The Sultan Dewa visited the Princess every day to follow the progress of her weaving, hoping that she would fail, so he would not have to marry her. One night before the cloth was supposed to be completed, it was a hot night. The Princess felt the heat and went to take her disguise off. She hung her body suit on the weaving frame and went to take her bath. The parents of Sultan Dewa heard the noise, and decided to investigate what was going on. They saw a beautiful woman taking her bath. They also saw a black body suit hung at the weaving frame. They decided to take the body suit and burn it. The Princess smelled the burning smell and stopped taking her bath. She looked for her body suit, but she found it was missing. She was frightened that people would know her secret. Then, she wrapped herself in a blanket until the next day. When the Sultan's mother came to check on her weaving, she refused to emerge from her blanket but kept on weeping. But the Sultan's mother wheedled her to continue finishing the cloth. She told the Princess that Sultan Dewa was asking whether she had finished the

cloth. She still refused to emerge from her blanket. The Sultan's mother tried to persuade the Princess to finish her weaving by reminding her of the punishment if she failed to do so.

While the Sultan's mother tried to persuade the Princess, she managed to get a peek at the Princess and was amazed at what she saw. The Princess had a fair complexion and was very beautiful. When the Sultan's mother saw the Princess, she decided that the lady was not an ordinary person, but she kept on persuading her to finish weaving the cloth. Due to her respect for the older woman, the Princess decided to continue her weaving task. While she was weaving, Sultan Dewa went to see the Princess with a sword and the intention to punish her for not finishing the cloth on time. However, when he saw her, he was enchanted by her beauty and fell in love with her. Then, he tried to coax the Princess to marry him, but she refused. Since then, Sultan Dewa went to sit in the room to observe the Princess performing her weaving task. He also kept on trying to persuade the Princess to marry him. The Princess still refused to marry him because of what he had done to her before he knew of her beauty. Sultan Dewa was frustrated and fell ill. While the sultan was ill, the Princess was kidnapped. She cried continuously while she was in captivity, and her tears turned into flowers.

A medicine man was sought to cure the Sultan. However, he was not able to do anything. According to the medicine man, in order for the Sultan to be cured, he needed to be sprinkled with water in which the flowers that emerged from the Princess's tears had been soaked, and must be covered with the magical cloth woven by her.

Before the Princess was kidnapped, she had managed to finish the cloth. However, after the princess completed weaving the cloth, she had folded the cloth into the size of a '*bangsi*' and unfortunately, only she could unfold it. Desperate to cure the Sultan, the court announced to the public that anyone who could unfold the cloth would be rewarded. Although many had tried, no one had succeeded.

One day, the Princess managed to escape from her captivity. Upon hearing that the Sultan was ill and knowing that she was the only one

who could cure him, she went to the palace and disguised herself by wearing a man's clothing. She called herself Bungsu Dewa. When she was allowed to see the sick Sultan, she sprinkled the water onto his face and unfolded the magical cloth. After she sprinkled the water and covered the Sultan with the magical cloth, he was cured. She was rewarded by the Sultan and became his companion.

After a while, the Sultan became suspicious of her and at the end found out her disguise. Then, the Sultan married her and they lived happily ever after.

Enchanted by the story, the designer told me she adopted certain terms that she found pleasant and suitable; and therefore, used them to name her designs. Other than *kain Si Lubang bangsi*, there are also other designs and motifs, such as *kain Si Pugut*, which she named based on myths and legends she read (Rosimah 2000: 19).

On the whole, the patterns of locally woven textiles can be divided into three major groups. There are *susunan bunga penuh* (full patterned arrangement), *susunan bunga bertabur* (scattered pattern arrangement) and *susunan bercorak* (styled arrangement). The word *bunga* in weaving terminology in Brunei Darussalam does not necessarily refer to the motif, but also the pattern and designs of the fabric.

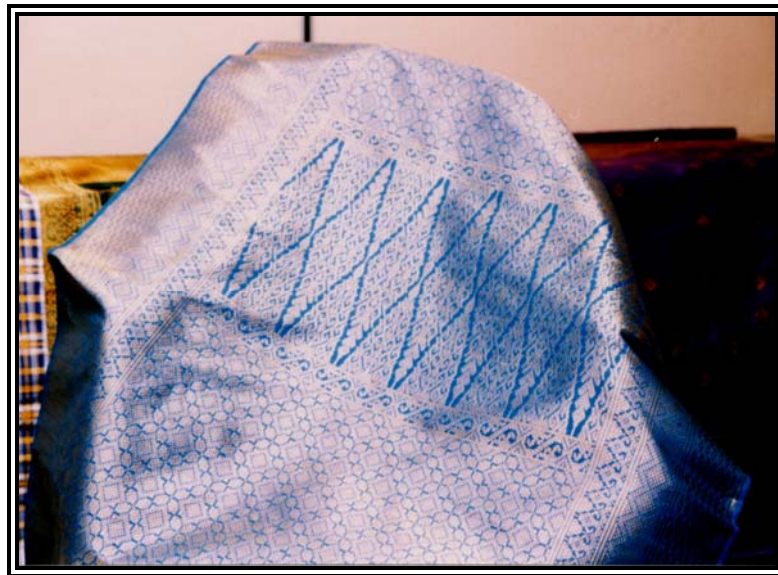
#### *Susunan Bunga Penuh (Full Patterned Arrangement).*

This pattern requires that the set of motifs which are used to design the cloth be repetitively woven over the whole body of the textile, except at the centre and the borders. This pattern employs gold or silver threads for the weft in addition to cotton or silk. The elaborate use of gold or silver threads woven into the fabric creates full designs of golden or silver motifs. There are five designs that can be categorised under the *susunan bunga penuh* pattern. They are *Jong sarat*, *Si Lubang bangsi*, *Sukmaindera*, *Si Pugut* and *Liputan madu*.

#### *Jong sarat.*

This design is one of the oldest and the most popular designs (see plate 42). According to the weavers, this design is fairly simple and easy to weave. It usually uses one colour as the background, and the motifs are in either gold or

silver thread. According to one informant, the *Jong sarat* received its name from its design: *jong* means boat; and *sarat* means full. The motifs give the effect of a boat that is fully loaded. However, the word *jong* is also derived from the word *tajung*, which means sarong. There are various types of *Jong sarat* and each of them is named according to the motifs used to adorn it. For instance, there is *Jong sarat bunga batu berkait* (connected stone motif), *Jong sarat bunga padi* (paddy motif) and *Jong sarat bunga melati* (jasmine motif).



**Plate 42: Sample of kain *Jong sarat* design.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

*Kain Sukmaindera.*

This is another of the oldest designs of Brunei's traditional woven cloth (see plate 43). It is considered one of the finest and most exquisite designs. Although new designs are being created and have gained in popularity, the *Sukmaindera* design is still recognised as being of fine quality. The motifs for *Sukmaindera* are repetitively arranged rhomboid shapes, and the spaces are filled with a floral motif. The rhomboid appears to frame the floral motif. The petals of the floral motifs are woven with different coloured or multi-coloured thread, whereas the centre of the floral motifs and the rhomboids are in gold or silver threads. This design usually has a single colour background.

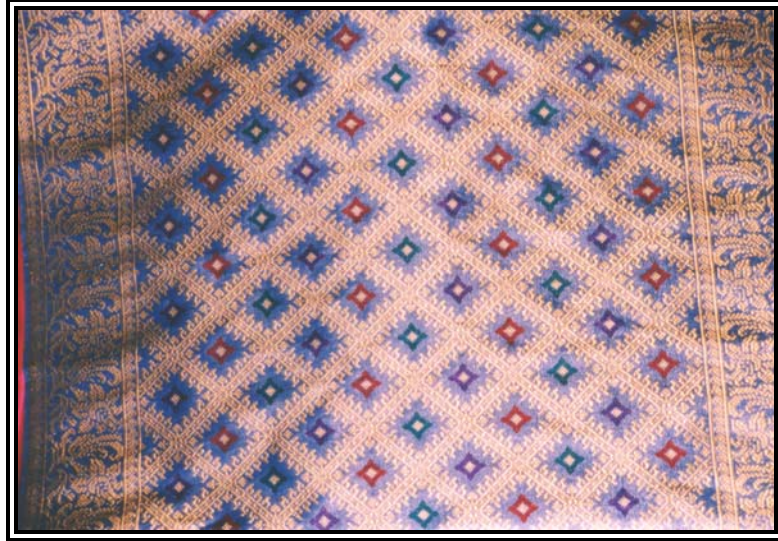


**Plate 43: Kain Sukmaindera design.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

*Kain Si Pugut.*

This is another design used to decorate traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam (see plate 44). *Pugut* in Brunei Malay means vandal. The design is so named because the weaver uses multi-colours for the fillings and motifs, as if the weaver is vandalising the material. But vandalised it is not, for it is one of the finest and most intricate designs (Siti Norkhalbi 1999). The design is probably derived from the older design of *Sukmaindera*, but has undergone some modifications. The rhomboid frame is arranged repetitively over the whole body of the fabric and the inner part is filled with two smaller rhomboid motifs. The second layer of rhomboid appears to frame the third one. Gold thread is used for the first and third layers, whereas multi-coloured thread is used for the second layer of each rhomboid. In effect, the fabric appears to have a multi-coloured motif decoration.



**Plate 44: *Kain Si Pugut* design.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

*Kain Si Lubang bangsi.*

This design is considered to be one of the most fashionable textiles (see plate 45). *Lubang* in Brunei Malay means ‘hole’. There are several meanings of *bangsi* in Brunei Malay. One of them means ‘in accordance’, while *bangsi* is also used to refer a musical instrument that similar to a harmonica. However, according to its designer *bangsi* means ‘the act of filling the hole’. This design also employs repetitive motifs that are fully arranged over the body of the fabric. This design also employs multi-coloured threads to decorate the motifs; however, the background uses a single colour. Gold or silver threads are used for the whole pattern, whereas multi-coloured threads are usually used to fill in the centre of the desired floral or geometrical motifs.



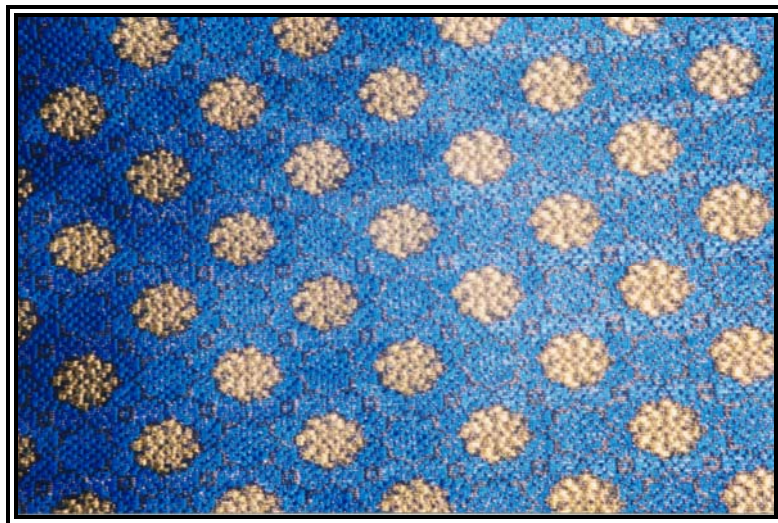


**Plate 45: Sample of kain *Si Lubang Bangsi* design.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

*Kain Liputan madu.*

This design is one of the latest designs of traditional textiles which are classified under the *susunan bunga penuh* pattern (see plate 46). *Liputan* means surrounding and *madu* means honey. The floral motif is surrounded by geometrical motifs. The geometrical motifs are repetitively arranged, and the background is in single colour. Gold or metallic thread is used for the floral motifs. In effect, the golden floral motifs emerge and appear scattered over the body of the fabric.



**Plate 46: Kain *Liputan Madu* design.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

### *Susunan Bunga Betabur* (Scattered Pattern Arrangement).

In *susunan bunga betabur*, the motifs decorating the cloth are arranged scattered repetitively but harmoniously over the body of the fabric (see plate 47). The motifs used to decorate the fabric may be of geometrical or floral shapes or both. There may also be combination of floral and geometrical shapes in which more than one type of floral and geometrical motif is used to decorate the fabric. The motifs are woven and present a scattered image on the fabric, yet produce great coherence, balance and visual beauty. The arrangement of the motifs on the fabric is how the textile gets its name *bertabur* which literally means 'to scatter'.

There are several designs under the category of *susunan bunga bertabur*, and each design is identified according to the motif used for the decoration. Some examples are: *arab gegati bunga anggerik* (combinations of rhomboid and orchids motifs), *arab gegati bunga berputar* (combinations of rhomboid and rotating floral motifs), *arab gegati bunga berkembang* (combinations of rhomboid and blooming floral motifs), *bunga kipas berputar berbinting* (combination of rotating fan and small geometrical motifs) and *bunga ros kembang berbinting* (combination of blooming rose and geometrical motifs).



**Plate 47: Sample of *Kain Bunga Bertabur*.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

*Susunan Bunga Bercorak* (Styled pattern Arrangement).

*Susunan Bunga bercorak* is designed with stripes or chequered (see plate 48). There are three designs under this category. There are vertical, horizontal and chequered designs.



**Plate 48: *Susunan Kain Bercorak*: *Kain Berturus* (on top) and *Kain Beragi* (below) designs.**

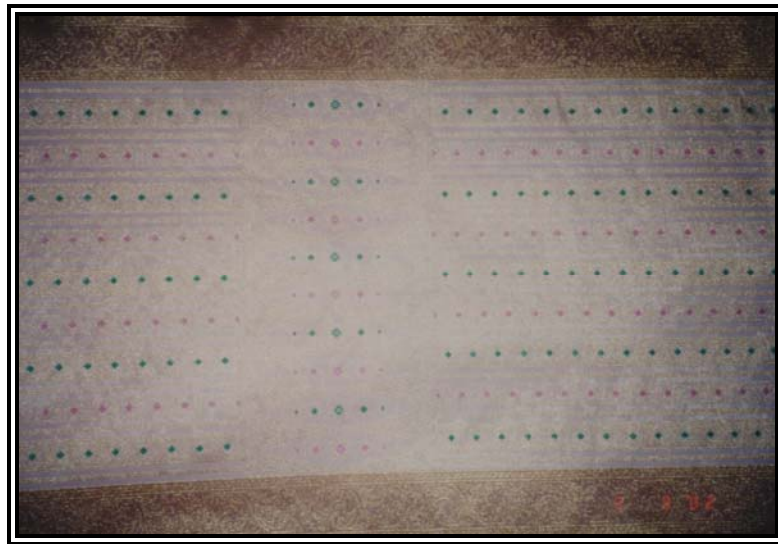
(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

#### The vertical stripe design.

This design is locally known as *kain beturus*. The decorations for the body of the stripes are an elongated pattern that runs along the weft between the two borders at the upper and lower part of the fabric. Such designs include *kain beturus bunga bersusun* (vertical stripe design with arranged floral motifs), *bunga tabur berturus* (vertical stripes design with scattered floral motifs), and *arab gegati bunga berturus* (vertical stripes design with rhomboid motif).

#### The horizontal stripe design.

This design is locally known as *kain melintang* and is decorated with stripes that run along the warp of the cloth (see plate 49). The stripes may vary from narrow to quite broad. The spaces between the bands of either the vertical or horizontal stripes may be filled with floral, geometrical or arabesque motifs. It is not uncommon to see combinations of motifs used to decorate such a design.



**Plate 49: Sample of *Kain Melintang* design.**

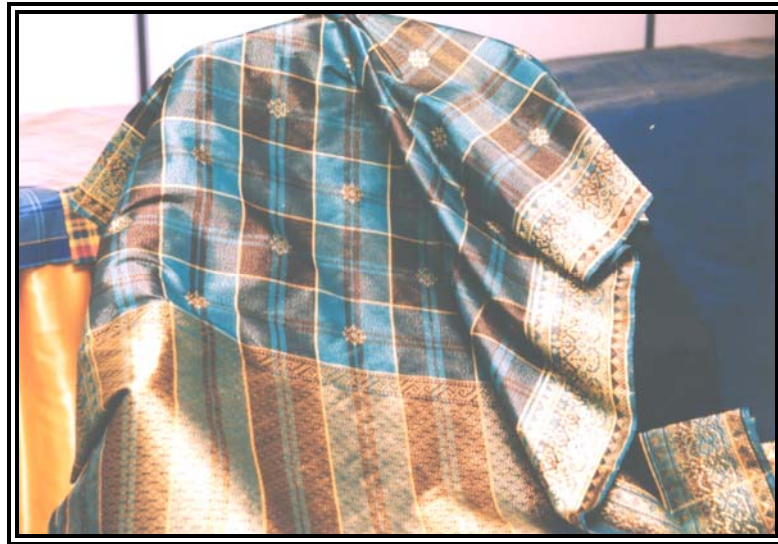
(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

#### The chequered design.

Locally known as *kain beragi*, the material is ornamented with a squared or chequered design on the body of the cloth (see plate 50). This pattern is usually composed of broad, differently coloured bands and stripes crossing at right angles to form smaller checks at the intersections. The colour arrangement of the warp and the weft threads play an important role in determining the



background image of the cloth. The centre of each square or *ragi*, may be filled with a floral or geometrical motif. This particular design is very similar to one of the Indonesian textiles, *Kain Bugis* (see Norwani 1987). The Bruneian designs include *kain beragi tabor tampok manggis* (chequered design with scattered motif of the calyx of mangosteen), *kain beragi tabor seri kelapa* (chequered design with scattered coconut shoot motif), and *kain beragi tabor bunga putar* (chequered design with scattered rotated floral motif).



**Plate 50: Sample of *Kain Beragi* design.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah)

The motifs used to decorate the *susunan bunga bertabur* pattern, such as the floral and geometrical motifs, are also used as the designs under the category of *susunan bercorak*. Such motifs fill in spaces in the bands between the stripes of the designs or in the middle of the square of a chequered design. In addition, arabesque motifs may be combined to adorn the fabrics of striped designs.

### **The Evolution and Innovation of the Motifs and Designs.**

In Brunei Darussalam, there is no certain way to date the creation of a design or motif used on traditional woven cloths. However, many of the contemporary designs have evolved from ‘traditional’ ones. Old designs are altered by adding selected colour combinations to certain parts of the motifs without radically altering the finished appearance. New designs are sometimes

formed on the surface of the fabric by weaving supplementary floating weft threads into existing motifs, resulting in a decorative effect that is similar to embroidery (Maxwell 1990). Old designs are also modified by reshaping or reworking the motifs or the designs, and now textiles are not only produced for clothing, but also for other items. Certain designs or motifs are reworked to suit not only the purpose, but also the shape and structure of these items. Image may be enlarged, simplified, altered in shape, or decreased in size, and also be combined into other patterns.

Motifs used to decorate Bruneians handicrafts made of brass and silver are also used to decorate traditional woven textiles. Such motifs are considered part of the regional artistic heritage and have become a way of manifesting Malay identity. However, care is taken to combine novel motifs with the older ones; so as not to degrade the expression of Malay identity or contradict the Islamic norm, which is viewed as parallel to Malay identity. The evolution and innovation of the patterns through the adaptation of the existing motifs reflects a concern with identity and social conservatism that requires a high level of conformity (Morell 1997: 207). The new motifs are also often developed to incorporate continuity with the past.

New motifs are created both by designers and weavers and are motivated by consumer taste and as a response to the demands of the market. Since my earlier research (Siti Norkhalbi 1999), it appears to me there has been innovation in the creation of new motifs and designs in Brunei Darussalam. For instance, new designs such as *Liputan madu*, have been created and become popular. Old designs have also been recreated and now more functional items and souvenirs are being produced. Although motifs and designs have been continuously modified, it has not negated or trivialised the authenticity of the traditional textiles. Rather the modifications have enhanced the aesthetic appearance of the fabric according to both producers and consumers of the textiles. In addition, the modifications have also been rendered in the exquisite quality of the textiles and remain authentic in their own way.

## **Conclusion.**

The evolution of the motifs, designs and techniques also initiates new names for the materials produced. New names are given to emerging designs. For instance, the oldest design i.e. *kain Jong sarat* has been recreated, modified and developed into emerging new designs that have been given new names. This is perhaps why later designs, such as *si Lubang bangsi*, *Si Pugut* and *Liputan madu* have come into existence. The development of the raw materials has also advanced the quality of the traditional textiles. Not only has the appearance of the textile been enhanced, but also the quality of the fabric. The importation of better quality threads used for the manufacturing of the fabric has heightened the quality. Furthermore, the employment of traditional hand-operated weaving implements ensures the production of the textile is genuinely hand-made.

Motifs contribute to the aesthetic value of the fabric and also conform to the principles of Islamic decoration. The adoption of multiple colours and the rich usage of gold, silver and metallic threads has also contributed a sophisticated appearance to the fabric, thus enhancing its aesthetic value. Islamic principles have played a significant role in the creation of motifs. Not all motifs used to decorate traditional textiles have symbolic meanings as the motifs are considered a means of adornment. However, the interpretation of certain motifs is related to the influence of Islam. This has shown how Islam has influenced its followers in all aspects of their lives, including as a foundation for creativity.

Environmental elements, such as plants, clouds and water have not only inspired the creation of motifs as ornamentation, but also have exerted substantial impact in naming certain motifs and designs of traditional textiles. In addition, the background of Brunei Darussalam as a monarchy has also to a certain extent inspired the naming of certain motifs. Such effects indicate the designers and weavers respect to the palace, the King and the nobility, as well as their attachment to other environmental factors that are linked to the core values of Brunei identity.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Golden mats may also refer to plaited and not woven cloth since both gold and silver plaited were used by nobles in many parts of Southeast Asia. Silver mats can still be found in Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> Islam forbids the use of the whole image of an animal in its visual art; however, adaptation of parts of the animal body, such as the wing, scales and elbow may be tolerated.

<sup>3</sup> Protective writing on shirts is widespread in Southeast Asia among Moslems and Buddhists. Such shirts are still used in Java, but rarely, and in general their use has decline (in Philippines, Thailand, Burma, Java, etc.). In the case of Burma and Thailand, Buddhists used such shirts to substitute or in addition to protective writing in the form of tattoo.

<sup>4</sup> This story was narrated to me in Brunei Malay dialect, and the English version is my translation.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Rites of Passage: Social Custom and the Influence of Islam.**

#### **Introduction.**

The Malays are well known for their ceremonies marking life cycle transitions, such as marriage, birth of first child, circumcision, puberty and death. In these ceremonies, which are regarded as an essential part of the Malay culture, traditional woven cloths are exchanged and used as clothing, furnishings and decorations. These ceremonies have helped to ensure that the production and use of traditional woven cloths continue.

In this chapter, I focus on Brunei Malays' use of traditional woven cloths in the following rites of passage ceremonies: marriage, the celebration of the new mother and her first-born child, circumcision, puberty and death. I suggest that the predominant role of Islamic teachings in encouraging and, in some cases, requiring certain rites to be performed has been fundamental in ensuring these rites continue to be strictly observed and with the proper usage of traditional textiles. I examine such ceremonies as strategies for displaying wealth and social prominence. I also examine the influence of foreign textiles, such as those from Malaysia, Indonesia and India, and their adaptation for ceremonial clothing, furnishings, and decorations at ceremonies commemorating the rites of passage. The coming of foreign traders, colonisation as well as the development of commercialisation and the global market, have exposed Bruneians to external influences, and encouraged them to adopt and adapt foreign textiles.

While there have been research and publications on the production of traditional woven cloth in Brunei Darussalam (Siti Norkhalbi 1999; Pengiran Ismail 1997; Masnah 1996), analysis of their usage and significance for social relations has been neglected. To date, there has been only one article published discussing the role and social significance of traditional woven cloths in Malay society in Brunei Darussalam; however, it is only a brief account (Siti Norkhalbi 2003).

In Eastern Sumba, textiles are used in marriages and funerals (Adams 1969; Forshee 2001). The quality and quantity of textiles indicates the social status of the bride and the deceased person (Forshee 2001: 4). In marriage, *ikat* cloths are given by the bride to her groom and family as counter prestations. Adams (1969) noted that according to the Eastern Sumba's custom or *adat*, marriage exchange must consist of goods classified as masculine and feminine. The groom's family must present a gift of a metal object, such as a pendant, gold chain, spears, swords and heavy brass bracelets which are classified as masculine goods, and a living creature to his bride's family, whereas the bride's family must also present a counter-gift of a cloth, which is classified as feminine goods, and a living creature. Such exchange is vital; without it, there is no legal marriage (Adams 1969: 47). Upon burial, the dead person is enfolded in layers of local textiles. Such display persists as a demonstration of status (Forshee 2001).

In Brunei Darussalam, traditional textiles are also being used in marriage and funeral ceremonies to demonstrate social status. Especially among the Brunei ethnic group, traditional woven cloths are also exchanged at marriage. Although the marriage is legal if the cloth is not exchanged, the marriage is considered as imperfect. The groom presents a piece of locally woven traditional textile to his bride as part of the marriage settlement indicating his financial stability. Presentation of traditional textiles by the bride to her groom may also indicate status. Traditional textiles are presented as part of counter-gifts especially if the bride is of similar or higher social status to her groom. Locally woven traditional textiles are also used at funerals to cover the coffin, especially among the nobles.

In her brief discussion of the usage of *songket* in Malaysia, Selvanayagam (1990) notes that the *songket* is used as a traditional costume worn at weddings and state functions and has also become the acknowledged attire for all formal Malay functions. During weddings, *songket* is not only worn by the bride and the groom, but also by the guests. It has also been used for decorative displays and furnishing, especially in the bridal chamber. This is similar to Brunei Darussalam, where traditional cloths are used as costumes, decorative displays and furnishing, especially among the Malays, indicating the use of traditional

textiles is closely linked to Malay tradition. In the following section, I describe the use of traditional cloths at rites of passage ceremonies and focus on the Brunei Malay community. I also analyse the importance of traditional textiles at such ceremonies and the role of Islam in influencing social customs.

### **Wedding Ceremonies.**

In Islamic law, marriage is the only context that permits sexual relations between a man and a woman. It is also through marriage that children may be conceived. Islam forbids sexual relations outside marriage; to conduct sexual relations outside marriage is considered as committing fornication/adultery or *zina*. Such prohibitions are clearly stated in the Quran and Sunnah (tradition of Prophet Mohammad). According to Brunei culture, marriage is about the union not only of two people, but also of their families. Marriage, in this sense, not only unites a groom and a bride, but also unites both families in an alliance.

Marriage is one of the memorable events in Brunei society and has to be conducted joyfully according to the custom. Although Islamic teaching only places importance on the *akad nikah* as the official declaration of marriage and organising a moderate function to celebrate the wedding, Brunei custom emphasises a series of rituals or ceremonies. The marriage ceremony in Brunei Darussalam is an integration of religious, social and cultural representations. According to Malay tradition, the bride and groom are regarded as ‘the king and queen of the day’; thus, they are treated as such at their wedding. The couple is dressed in the finest garments.

The wedding ceremonies follow a series of order and each ceremony is held on a specified day at a specified time. According to Brunei culture, a wedding ceremony is divided into the following stages: the pre-engagement ceremonies, the engagement ceremony, the pre-wedding ceremonies, the wedding ceremony and the post-wedding ceremonies. The reception, which is also known as *majlis bersanding* (sitting-in-state-day ceremony), is the climax of the wedding. The post-wedding ceremonies include *majlis malam berambil-ambilan*

(acquiring night ceremony) and *majlis pengantin muleh* (the return of wedding couple ceremony).

Pre-Engagements: *Majlis Merisik*.

The pre-engagement ceremonies include *majlis merisik* (enquiring ceremony), *majlis bersuruh* (proposing ceremony) and *majlis menghantar tanda* (marking the engagement ceremony). Traditionally, when a man decided to marry a woman, he would express his interest to his parents either directly or through someone he trusted. If the parents had no objection to their son's choice, a few older women, usually dressed in traditional costume, were sent to represent the man's parents and make inquiries regarding the woman's marriageability. This is locally known as *merisik* (inquiring). If the woman is eligible, the representatives would then express the interest of the man by using metaphors or exchanging of *pantun* (quatrains).

Metaphors such as *di rumah ani ada bunga yang sedang berkembang kuntumnya, kalau belum dipetik baiklah ditamukan jodohnya ...* (there is a blooming flower in this house; if it has not been plucked, it would be better to match her with ...) or *sekiranya bersetuju ada jua untuk mengganti lantai buruk, untuk tongkat dinding inda baik...* (If agreed to, there would be someone to help replace the rotten floor, to be the support of the decaying wall...) were commonly used. The term 'blooming flower' was usually used to refer to the woman to be proposed to, whereas 'someone to help or support' was used to refer to the man who had the intention of proposing. However, the usage of metaphors to propose is now rare, as not many possess the skills needed to exchange quatrains. It is now common for the representatives to express their intention directly.

It is important to find out the status of the woman to whom the marriage proposal is directed. According to Islamic teaching, it is forbidden to propose to an engaged or married woman. When it is confirmed that the woman is not committed to anyone, then the man will send his envoy for the *majlis bersuruh* (proposing ceremony). The bride's representative would usually request a few days before making any decision. After a decision has been made, the woman's representative would go to the man's residence and pronounce their acceptance. If

the proposal was refused, there would be no notification from the woman's side, and it would be understood that the proposal had been turned down (Hashim 2003). In the past, the woman's parents could make the decision to accept or reject the proposal without her consent. In those days, one did not reject one's parents' decision. However, this practice is rarely carried out, although the consent of both the parents and the person to be married will be sought. At present, the couple court one another before they decide to get married. According to Islamic teaching, the father or guardian has the right to accept a marriage proposal on behalf of the woman without having to seek for her approval only if the woman has never been married before. Nonetheless, asking for her permission is encouraged. If the woman is a divorcee or widower, consent must be sought from her.

*Majlis Menghantar Tanda Bertunang.*

When a proposal has been accepted, a *majlis menghantar tanda bertunang* (ceremony to mark the engagement) is held. At this event, the parents' representatives for the groom-to-be go to the future bride's family house. They are usually represented by their siblings and close relatives of both sexes. Both parties elect elderly men as their spokesmen. I observed a *menghantar tanda* ceremony between Hajah Aziha and Sharol Adnani on the 21 July 2002 held at the future bride's family house. I was informed that the future groom's parents' had elected his uncle to be his spokesperson, whereas the future bride parents' chose an elderly male relative to be theirs.



**Plate 51: Representatives from both groom and bride at the *Majlis menghantar tanda*.**

(Photo: Aziman Pehin Dato Haji Yaakub)

During the ceremony, the man again sends his representatives and gives rings and a certain amount of money to mark the engagement (see plate 51). In this particular ceremony, Shahrol's representative brought two silver trays, each of them consisted of a ring and a certain amount of notes in Brunei Dollars, which were framed. The first tray, which held a ring and one hundred dollar note called *pembuka mulut* (mouth opener), was presented to the parents' representative for the bride to begin the ceremony. When the tray was accepted, the spokesman of the bride-to-be asked the delegates their purpose for coming as a formality. The future groom's spokesman explained and once their wish was understood and accepted by the future bride's party, the other tray, consisting of a ring and Brunei notes of three hundred dollars called *tanda bertunang* (marker of engagement), was presented. The acceptance of this tray marked the couple's engagement. Usually, at this point only money and rings were presented to the bride-to-be. However, in core noble families, for example, in a recent ceremony between the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and Dayangku Sarah held on the 31 August 2004, a piece of *kain Jong sarat* (traditional woven cloth), a complete set of dress<sup>1</sup>, a pair of bangles, a pair of ear studs and a strand of necklace were also included (Jawatankuasa Penerangan Dan Perhubungan Istiadat Perkahwinan Diraja 2004) (see plate 52).



**Plate 52: The delegation of The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam was bringing gifts for the bride as the marker of the engagement.**

(Photo: <http://infofoto.org.bn/gallery>, accessed 18 September 2004)

At the *menghantar tanda* ceremony, the bride settlement and exchange are usually discussed after the acceptance of the marker of engagement. They are usually determined by the bride's parents or family. During the ceremony held for Hajah Aziha and Sharol, when the future groom's spokesman requested the terms for the bride settlement and exchange, the future bride's representative presented a piece of paper on which the details of bride settlement and gifts to be exchanged were printed. Like the case of the Malays in Jambi (see Kerlorgue 2000), gift exchange is heavily weighted in favour of the female side. The groom must give large amount of money and gifts, including textiles, whereas the bride will only give food as counter-gifts. In addition, the bride also gives other gifts, including clothing and accessories. In Brunei Darussalam, the bride settlement and exchange usually consists of *berian* or *mahar* (the bridegroom's settlement on the bride), *belanja dapur* (kitchen expenses), a piece of *kain Jong sarat* (a piece of locally woven traditional cloth) and *cincin* (ring). As for Hajah Aziha, her sister told me that their parents also requested the above mentioned settlement and exchange. The bride settlement and exchange will be presented to the future bride at the *majlis menghantar berian* (presentation of bride settlement ceremony) at a later date.

*Majlis Menghantar Berian.*

The *majlis menghantar berian* is usually held on a Friday or Sunday afternoon, after the *zuhur* (noon) prayer. During my fieldwork, I observed the ceremony held for Abdul Aziz, who was marrying Rosita. The ceremony was held on Friday, 23 June 2002 at 2.30 in the afternoon. I was invited to the groom's ceremony, but when the delegation went to the bride's house, I followed them as part of the groom's party. The bride and groom hold separate ceremonies at their own homes. On this occasion, both bride and groom invite family members and friends to their houses respectively on the same day. The groom then sends his delegates in a procession with the bride settlement, the traditional woven cloth and other wedding gifts, to the bride's residence. Each of the wedding gifts is placed on a *gangsa* (tray). The gifts are presented in front of the audience at the bride's house. One or more representatives may be elected to witness and confirm the bride settlement and wedding gifts. Traditionally, the gifts were covered with cloths and sewn, which signified the status of the bride, that is, that she had never before been married (Mohd. Jamil 2003b:26). Uncovered gifts indicated that the bride was a widow or divorcee. Such practice is rarely observed now. In the current practice, it is common for the gifts to be displayed for the guests to see. The *berian* and *belanja dapur* (kitchen expenses) are arranged and framed, whereas the other gifts are usually put in transparent boxes or wrapped with decorated transparent plastic wrap. Recently, at the ceremony held between the Crown Prince of Brunei and Dayangku Sarah, all the gifts presented to his future bride were covered with yellow satin (see plate 53). It appeared to me that the practise is still observed only by the royal family.





**Plate 53: The presentation of bride settlement and wedding gifts ceremony between the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and Dayangku Sarah on the 31 August 2004.**

(Photo: <http://infofoto.org.bn/gallery>, accessed 18 September 2004)

The *berian*, also known as *mas kahwin*, is one of the most essential aspects of the settlement, as it legitimises the engagement between the couple. In Brunei custom, the *berian* is usually cash. The amount of *berian* varies between three hundred and five hundred Brunei dollars. However, there is no fixed amount. It is up to the bride's family to determine the amount. A higher status bride may claim a higher *berian*. For instance, the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam gave one thousand dollars of *berian* to his bride. At Abdul Aziz's presentation of bride settlement ceremony I observed the amount of *berian* was three hundred dollars. I remember when my sister got married in 1999, my parents requested five hundred dollars from the groom.

In Islamic law, *berian* is an important component of the marriage contract and must be given by the groom to his bride. Although her father or guardian determines the amount of the *berian*, the bride has the full right over it. The marriage may only be consummated if the groom has settled the *berian* money or if the bride agrees that it may be settled at a later date. In Brunei Darussalam, it rarely happens as the bride settlement is presented with other wedding gifts in a specified ceremony later. According to the Malay custom, the *berian* money must be spent to buy the bride gold or equivalent accessories that are made of gold or equivalent, such as a necklace, bracelet or ring. According to my informants, the

jewellery that is obtained using the *berian* money has sentimental value for the couple and is a way of signifying their relationship. My sister told me she combined and used the *berian*, *pembuka mulut* and *tanda bertunang* money given to her by her husband and bought a gold bracelet and necklace. Such a tangible object is used as an objectification of inalienable possession for the bride and a giving-while-keeping (Weiner 1992) for the groom.

*Belanja dapur* (kitchen expenses) is another gift from the groom, also settled with a certain amount of money. It varies between three thousand to five thousand Brunei dollars and is determined by the bride's family, and is used to subsidise the wedding ceremony at the bride's house. I saw Abdul Aziz gave his future bride the amount of five thousand dollars. In the past, the amount of *berian* and *belanja dapur* correlated with the social stratification and varied according to the rank of the bride (Brown 1970). A higher ranking bride usually claimed a higher amount. At present, it is more tied to the academic status of the bride rather than social status, although both may also overlap.

A piece of traditional woven cloth of *Jong sarat* design is also demanded by the bride's family (see plate 54). It is also known as *kepala berian* (head of the bride price settlement). There is no specification of colour of the fabric; however, a brightly coloured *Jong sarat* is commonly preferred. In the past, my informants explained, a cloth of red colour was popularly requested, as the colour signifies happiness and prosperity. The cloth is usually commissioned or purchased from weavers. Money cannot be *ganti* (substituted) for the cloth nor can it be rented or borrowed. Furthermore, the cloth may not be replaced by an imported one. Rather, the cloth is woven for the bride and acquired by the groom from a weaver in Brunei Darussalam. According to my informant, the cloth becomes a permanent possession of the bride and remains as *tanda kasih* (marker of love) and a reminder of the ties between the husband and wife. It also symbolises the interrelationships between the couple. In addition, the cloth also represents the ability of the groom to provide for his bride. My high non-noble informant told me,

The *Jong sarat* (woven cloth) is requested as part of the bride price to mark the engagement; if he cannot afford it, he can't marry my daughter... if a man wants to take a wife, he must have money and must afford to buy the *Jong sarat* (woven cloth)....<sup>2</sup>

According to him, the capability of the groom to fulfil the bride's demand indicates his competence as the provider and head of his family. My other informants also told me that the inability of the groom to present his bride with the cloth would mean that the bride's settlement was incomplete. It would cause embarrassment to both parties, as one of them mentioned to me,

It would be such a shame if a groom did not *menghantar berian* (give a wedding gift) of *kain Jong sarat* (traditional woven cloth) to his bride. Maybe he cannot afford it or did not have a high income<sup>3</sup>.

Another informant told me the importance of presenting traditional cloth as part of bride settlement to keep with tradition that has been inherited for generations, and it would be such a disgrace to omit the practice. These statements suggest that the groom was put down for his inability to provide his bride with the cloth, which implied that he was not financially stable. In addition, such inability was also considered to dishonour the tradition. Among the Malays in Brunei Darussalam, keeping up with the tradition is an important practice, as it is considered a way of reflecting *identiti kebruneian* (Brunei identity).



**Plate 54: Traditional woven cloths for wedding exchange.**

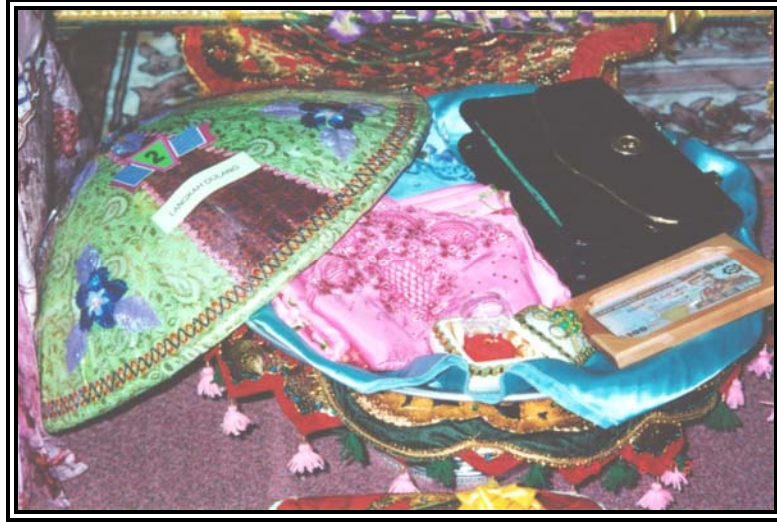
(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

Other gifts may also be requested, such as clothing, cosmetics, jewellery, toiletries and other necessities. I saw Abdul Aziz's gifts to his bride include several pieces of unstitched imported silk cloths, two sets of jewellery, handbags and shoes (see plate 55). If the bride has an older female sibling who is still single, the groom may have to give the bride's sister a set of clothing (usually four metres of unstitched imported silk cloth), a certain amount of money, and a ring. These gifts were placed on a tray and usually covered with *tudung dulang* (tray/platter cover). This is locally known as *langkah dulang* (step over the platter). However, such a bestowal would only be provided if the bride's family asked for it. Such a request can also be seen as a form of punishment for not waiting for the older sister to marry first. The *langkah dulang* is sent together with the wedding gifts during the presentation of the bride settlement. In Abdul Aziz's case, it was understood that his bride had a single elder sister, as he had to provide her a *langkah dulang* tray (see plate 56). When my sister got married, her husband also had to provide me *langkah dulang*, consisting of unstitched cloths, a gold ring and a hundred dollar note.



**Plate 55: Sets of wedding gifts which will be sent to the bride.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)



**Plate 56: *Langkah dulang* set which will be given to the single older sister of the bride.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

The bride's side also presents a procession of counter-gifts, especially if the bride is of the same or higher social status. When Abdul Aziz sent his delegation for the presentation of bride settlement and wedding gifts, there was an exchange of gifts, as his bride, Rosita, presented cooked food, such as, sweets and cakes as well as clothing, accessories and toiletries (see plate 57). She also presented her groom a piece of traditional woven cloth of *Liputan madu* design. There is no specification of design of traditional cloth according to gender or other variables, as the bride may give her groom any design of traditional cloth she prefers. However, *kain beragi* and *Jong sarat* design are commonly used.

Formerly, the counter-gifts were not necessarily presented on the same day. According to my informants, the foods were usually sent to the groom three days after the *menghantar berian* ceremony. If the couple had a long engagement, food was also exchanged especially during festive seasons, such as Ramadhan (fasting month) and *Syawal* (the month after Ramadhan when Muslim celebrate *Eid ul-Fitr*) for the duration of their engagement period. When I was younger, I remember one of my cousins used to exchange food during Ramadhan and *Syawal* with his fiancé. The clothing would only be given when the groom came to stay after the wedding ceremony as part of the groom's wardrobe and



kept at the bride's house as a welcoming gesture. This is locally known as *pengaluan* (clothes provided by a bride for her groom).



**Plate 57: Counter-gifts from the bride for her groom.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

*Majlis Akad Nikah.*

The *akad nikah* (marriage solemnization) is usually held after the engagement. This is the most important event, in which the marriage is registered. Formerly, the ceremony was held at the groom's residence, after the necessary proceedings, such as getting signatures from the bride and her guardian approving the marriage. Now, it is increasingly common to see *majlis akad nikah* held at the bride's residence. In the case of Abdul Aziz, he performed his *akad nikah* at his bride's family home, in front of his bride, and attended by guests and relatives from both parties. In Brunei Darussalam, the *akad nikah* is performed by an appointed religious officer (*juru nikah*) in front of the groom, the bride's father or guardian (*wali*), two witnesses and other invited guests.

At his *akad nikah* ceremony, Abdul Aziz wore a white traditional Malay costume, with *sinjang* and *dastar* made of traditional woven cloths (see plate 59); and his bride wore a white silk *baju kebaya* and headscarf. The completion of the *akad nikah* marks the official marriage, but according to Brunei culture the wedding has yet to be concluded. After the ceremony, the groom then went back to his house with his delegation and the bride stayed at her family's house.

Much emphasis is put on the costume worn by the groom at the marriage solemnization ceremony. The groom is usually dressed in traditional attire, which consists of a tunic, a pair of trousers, head-gear and traditional woven *sinjang*. The head-gear might be a black *songkok* (black velvet cap) or *dastar* (specially folded traditional woven cloth for head gear). For some grooms, a whole set of traditional attire made from traditional woven cloths is worn during this occasion. The bride is also dressed either in *baju kurung* or *baju kebaya*. The costume is less elaborate when the ceremony is held at the groom's house. It is also possible for the groom to hold the ceremony at the mosque. For instance, at the recent wedding of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, his *akad nikah* ceremony was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2004 at the Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, but his bride was not present. He wore white traditional Malay costume and *dastar* made from traditional woven cloths (see plate 58). However, many couples now choose to hold the solemnisation ceremony at the bride's place and the bride attends with her groom before the *juru nikah*, thus requiring both to dress up. Both bride and groom are usually dressed in an identical colour. There is no specific colour prescription, although it is common to see a white or ivory-coloured costume worn by the couple. White clothes are associated with the Islamic tradition, as white was one of the Prophet Mohammad's favourite colours. Therefore, its use has the connotation of following his *sunnah*, which is commendable according to Islamic teaching.



**Plate 58: Solemnisation Ceremony of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam.**

(Photo: <http://infofoto.org.bn/gallery>, accessed 18 September 2004)



**Plate 59: the *juru nikah* declares his authority to marry the groom to his bride at the solemnisation ceremony.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

### *Majlis Berbedak.*

The next step of the wedding celebration is *majlis berbedak* (powdering ceremonies). There are two powdering ceremonies; one is held during the day, usually after the *Zohor* (mid-day) or *Asar* (afternoon) prayer, locally known as *majlis berbedak siang* (the powdering day ceremony), usually a week before the wedding reception, and the other is organised in the evening, usually after the *Isya'* (night) prayer, locally known as *majlis malam berbedak* (the powdering night ceremony), a few days prior to the reception. These ceremonies are held



separately at the couple's respective residences, each of them having an individual reception. I was not able to attend Abdul Aziz's powdering day ceremony, as I had just arrived in Brunei Darussalam from Perth and only came to know about the wedding when the powdering day ceremony was being held. However, I had witnessed many similar occasions held for my siblings, close relatives and friends.

The powdering day ceremony is usually quite private, with only close relatives invited. During these ceremonies, both the bride and groom are dressed in costumes of traditional woven clothes and seated in the living room in front of the guests (see plate 60). They sit on an ornate mat made of traditional woven cloth as well. A paste of specially mixed ground powder and aromatic spices is made and smeared on their hands or foreheads. The smearing is usually performed by elderly close relatives. After the event, both take a ritual bath assisted by an older lady locally known as *pengangun*. This event also marks the beginning of the confinement period for both the bride and groom.

The confinement period usually ends seven days after the wedding. During this period, neither the bride nor the groom is allowed to go out of their individual house compounds or do things that might harm them. In the past, the confinement period was up to forty days. Now, such a practice is only loosely observed.



**Plate 60: A powdering ceremony held for the bride.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

The powdering night ceremony is much grander compared to the powdering day ceremony. At the ceremony, not only are relatives invited, but also friends and neighbours. For some families, the counter party family members are also invited. However, this depends on the families. During these ceremonies, the bride and groom are dressed in traditional costumes made from traditional woven cloths. There is no specification of colour for the costume, but a bright colour is usually preferred. Generally, bright colours are preferred for clothing and furnishings during weddings and other festive celebrations signifying happiness and enthusiasm.

At Abdul Aziz's powdering ceremony, he wore red traditional woven clothes which include a tunic, trousers, *sinjang*, belt and head-gear. He wore a black *songkok*, specially decorated with golden ornaments which look like a supplementary crown, known as *kopiah berpisnin* (see plate 61). Some grooms may wear instead a *dastar*. For instance, at his powdering night ceremony on the 5 September 2004, the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam wore yellow traditional woven clothes, *sinjang* and *dastar* (see plate 62). The groom also wore traditional golden accessories, such as two sets of *gelang pengaluan* (each set

consists of seven golden bangles bound together), arm bangles and a pair of *kuas* (epaulettes) and a necklace called *mudapun*.



**Plate 61:** The groom accompanied by the *Pengangun* during the Powdering night ceremony.

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah)



**Plate 62:** The Raja Isteri (Queen) applying powder paste onto the Crown Prince's palms.

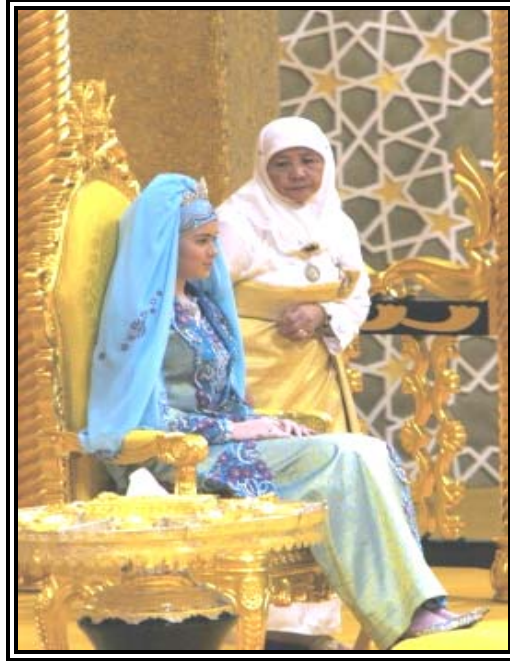
(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The female's clothing includes *baju*, sarong and *kain kapit*. The *kain kapit* is usually the traditional cloth given by the groom at the bride settlement ceremony. When my cousin had her powdering night ceremony held on 8 August 2002, she wore a yellow *baju kebaya* ornamented with embroidery and beads, and red *kain kapit*. Her *kain kapit* was a Bruneian traditional woven cloth, whereas her costume was imported woven cloth. In addition, she was adorned with golden accessories, such as *bunga goyang* (head ornaments), *panding* (golden belt), and two sets of *gelang pengaluan*, a pair of *gelang geroncong* (anklets), ear rings and necklace (see plate 63). At the recent royal wedding, the bride wore these accessories at her henna tinting ceremony instead of the powdering night ceremony. At the powdering night ceremony held for Dayangku Sarah (the bride of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam), she wore turquoise richly embroidered *baju kebaya* made of traditional woven cloths, veil and tiara (see plate 64).



**Plate 63: Powdering night ceremony for bride.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)



**Plate 64: The bride of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam at her powdering night ceremony.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

During the event, the bride and groom are seated on the dais, accompanied by an elderly woman locally known as *pengangun*. The *pengangun* wears traditional dress, with a *kain kapit* around her mid-body. At the royal wedding, the bride and groom were accompanied by two *pengangun*. While seated on the dais, some guests are selected by the parents to put powder paste on the palms or forehead of the bride and groom. My informant told me, in former times, only parents, married siblings and elderly close relatives were invited to apply the powder paste. However, this is still practiced by the royal family.

At the recent royal wedding, I saw only the parents and immediate relatives of the wedded couple were invited to apply the powder paste, and special official was appointed to invite them to apply the powder paste. There are seven colours of powder pastes and each colour is placed in its respective golden container. These containers are arranged on a large golden platter. The colours are red, yellow, blue, white, green, orange and pink (see plate 65). According to my informant, the application of the paste is believed to enhance the radiance of the bride and groom. The signification of such colours is not known, but it might



indicate pre-Islamic influence, as Brunei culture has been heavily influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism.



**Plate 65: The powder paste consisting of seven different colours.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

For core nobles, on the day before the powdering night ceremony, another exchange of gifts is held. The groom sends over to his bride four candle sticks, powder, perfumes, cosmetics, ornaments, a piece of *kain Jong sarat* (traditional woven cloth) and another complete set of clothes made of traditional woven cloth. The bride, in return, sends her groom perfumes and powders, as well as a complete Malay costume. However, according to my informant, such exchange by the bride is only conducted if she is of the same social status as her groom. A bride of a lower status does not necessarily have to give counter gifts to her groom.

#### *Majlis Berinai.*

The next function is the henna tinting ceremony, locally known as *Majlis Berinai*. It is held on the eve of the wedding reception. It is quite similar to the powdering ceremony, but only close relatives and friends are invited. At this event, the bride and groom are also dressed in traditional woven clothes. The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam wore turquoise traditional woven clothes and headgear ( see plate 66). However, some brides and grooms may choose to wear different types of materials. For instance, Abdul Aziz wore plain purple satin

material for his traditional costume, but his *sinjang* and *dastar* was of Bruneian traditional woven cloths of matching colour (see plate 67).



**Plate 66: The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam during his henna tinting ceremony.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah)



**Plate 67: Abdul Aziz wearing dark purple traditional woven cloth *sinjang* at his henna tinting ceremony.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

The bride of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam wore red imported material which was made into *baju kebaya*. She also wore maroon *kain kapit* of traditional woven cloths around her mid body (see plate 68). When my best friend got married in September 1999, she did not wear traditional woven cloth for her costume at the henna tinting ceremony. She chose to wear peach lace

material she bought in Mecca, which she made into *baju kebaya*. The bride is usually adorned with traditional accessories and jewellery. Elaborate ornaments are used for the bride. While seated on the dais, older or married siblings and close relatives are invited to put the henna paste on the bride's and groom's palms.



**Plate 68: Dayangku Sarah (the bride of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam) during her henna tinting ceremony.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

After the ceremony, henna paste is put on the top part of all fingers covering all the nails and at the centre of the palms, as well as the feet, including the soles, for a few hours until it stains. The henna stain signifies the status of the newly weds. This practice is another indication of the Hindu influence in Bruneian marriage ceremonies.

*Majlis Bersanding (Sit-on Dais Ceremony).*

The wedding reception is the climax of the marriage rites. The reception is usually held mid-morning on Sunday, a week after the *akad nikah*. At the ceremony, the bride and groom finally come together and sit on the dais (*bersanding*) in front of members of both families, friends and invited guests. Although there is no rule as to specific design or colour to be worn for weddings, the groom and bride are dressed in traditional woven clothes of similar colour and



design. The uniformity of colour and design of the clothing symbolises unity and understanding (Siti Norkhalbi 1999).

At their wedding, Abdul Aziz and Rosita wore peach traditional woven clothes of similar design (see plate 69). I was told by Abdul Aziz's mother that the material was especially made for them. The groom was also adorned with ornaments: a big brooch-like decoration was attached to his *dastar*, and he held a Malay dagger or kris. The kris symbolises masculinity. The bride was dressed in clothing elaborately decorated with embroidery, and beads of multiple colours which matched her clothes. In addition, she was adorned with accessories, a head-scarf and veil, tiara and jewellery as well as a flower bouquet. Her face was beautifully made up by a commissioned beautician. At their wedding, the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and his bride wore blue traditional woven clothes (see plate 70). He wore a gold crown instead of *dastar* for head-gear. His bride wore veil and tiara; and she also held a gold flower bouquet decorated with diamonds.



**Plate 69: Abdul Aziz and Rosita on their *Majlis Bersanding*, accompanied by the best man and *pengangun*.**

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah).

Before the wedded couple sit together on the dais, the bride and groom usually hold separate receptions at their respective houses. Close and distant family members, as well as friends and acquaintances, are invited. Tents are erected, and chairs and tables are arranged inside them. The seats for males and females are separately arranged. Food and drinks are also served. When the reception officially starts and the guests are seated, a prayer is recited. Then, the parents and siblings of the wedded couple go around the tents to meet their guests and shake hands with them. In Brunei Darussalam, the bride does not go out and meet her guests before she sits on the dais. Her parents and siblings meet her guests on her behalf, whereas the groom leads his father and siblings to shake hands, especially with the male guests. Such a gesture is to show their gratitude and appreciation to their guests for attending the event. The guests also give gifts to the wedded person. The gifts can be in the form of money or goods. The money is put in an envelope with the name of the contributor inscribed. Gifts, such as electrical appliances, photo albums and dinner sets, may also be given by guests to the newly weds.

After the hand shaking, the guests are invited to have their meal. At his wedding, Abdul Aziz wore red traditional woven clothes during the shaking of hands. Then, he changed into peach traditional woven clothes with a different design. When he finished dressing, the groom was led out of his room and seated on the dais, accompanied by his best man, who was dressed in a traditional costume which Abdul Aziz wore earlier, and a *pengangun*, who was dressed in *baju kurung* and *kain kapit* of traditional cloth around her mid body. A prayer was recited to bless the groom and the marriage ceremony. Later, the groom left his house to meet his bride at her family's house.

At the bride's house, when the groom arrives, the bride is seated on the dais waiting for her groom to claim her. The groom is led by an older man inside the house to the dais where his bride is waiting to be claimed. The groom touched his bride's shoulders, right and left, and her forehead briefly, signifying his claim, in line with the Islamic teaching that a groom should touch his new bride's forehead when claiming her. At the royal wedding, the Sultan (the groom's

father) was honoured to lead the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam to touch his bride's forehead and made his claim (see plate 70). The groom is encouraged to mention the name of Allah while touching his bride's forehead and to pray for Allah's blessing. Then, he is seated next to his bride on the dais (see plate 71). Another prayer is recited to bless the ceremony and the wedded couple and to mark the end of the wedding reception. At the wedding of the Crown Prince, before the prayer was read, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam conferred upon his new daughter-in-law the royal title and honorific she was marrying the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam. From then onward, the bride was officially known as Her Royal Highness Pengiran Anak Isteri Pengiran Anak Sarah<sup>4</sup>.



**Plate 70: The groom touch his bride's forehead.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 71: The wedding couple sitting on the dais.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

In Brunei Darussalam, although the marriage solemnization ceremony legitimises the marriage, it is the wedding reception at which the newlyweds sit on the dais together that marks the marriage publicly. This reception is significant to the extent that a marriage is considered socially incomplete if the reception is not held (Hashim 2003).

*Majlis Malam Berambil-ambilan.*

On the same evening, there is another ceremony locally known as *majlis malam berambil-ambilan* (acquiring night ceremony), centred on the married couple sitting on the dais. At this event close members of both families are in attendance. During my fieldwork, I was not able to observe Abdul Aziz's *majlis berambil-ambilan* ceremony, as I was not feeling well. For the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam's wedding, it was replaced with a royal banquet which was held on the next evening after the wedding. At the dinner, the Crown Prince was dressed in military uniform, whereas the bride wore a yellow, elaborately embroidered *baju kebaya* made of traditional woven cloths (see plate 73). But at other *majlis malam berambil-ambilan* I had attended, such as my siblings', friends' and relatives', the bride and groom were usually dressed in traditional wedding costumes similar to those worn during their *majlis bersanding*, but of

different colours and design. Some couples wore imported woven materials, but there were also those who chose to wear locally woven ones (see plate 72).



**Plate 72: My friend and I at our best friend's *Majlis berambil-ambilan*.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

After they sit on dais, the couple have dinner with the relatives and guests. The bride sits with her female in-laws, siblings, relatives and guests, and the groom with his in-laws. This ceremony is held for those members of the families who have had no chance to witness the day's event. It also provides the chance for the couple and family members to get to know the other family members with whom they have not yet had the chance to be acquainted.





**Plate 73: The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, his bride and guests at their Wedding Banquet.**

(Photo: <http://www.infofoto.org.bn/gallery>, accessed 18 September 2004).

*Majlis Pengantin Muleh.*

The marriage rites are concluded when the final ceremony is held three or seven days after the wedding reception. This is locally known as *majlis pengantin muleh* (literally, translated ‘the return of the wedding couple’). The ceremony is usually held in the evening at the bride’s house. The groom goes back to his own family’s house in the morning, but he will return to his bride’s house in the evening. At the time he goes back to his family’s house, he is accompanied by a few of his bride’s elderly relatives. According to my informants, in former times, they would bring a piece of white cloth which was used for the top cover of the bed sheet (only when the bride has never been married), known as *bunga lapik pinang* (flower of betel nut lining). When the marriage was consummated it was expected that there would be an indication of her virginity. The proof was shown to the groom’s elderly family members. However, this practice is no longer observed. In addition, it is considered a violation of Islamic teaching as such a practice might tarnish the reputation of the bride. For a core noble bride, she gives her groom a set of Malay clothes, a piece of *kain Jong sarat* (traditional woven cloth) and other accessories, such as kris and ring (Jabatan Pusat Sejarah 1996).

When the groom returns to his bride's house, he is accompanied by his family and relatives. He also brings goods, such as uncooked food and other necessary utensils. The food supplies are supposed to sustain the couple while in confinement, a period which usually lasted up to forty days. Traditionally, this practice was strictly observed; however, the practice has now come to signify the beginning of married life. Moreover, the confinement period is now only loosely observed. The wedded couple again sit on the dais. They are attired in traditional woven clothes. At the ceremony held for the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, he and his bride wore red wedding costume made of traditional woven cloths (see plate 74). Abdul Aziz and Rosita wore the same costumes they had worn at their *majlis bersanding*.



**Plate 74: The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and his bride during the Muleh Tiga Hari Ceremony.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

In some families, while the couple is seated on the dais, the mother and female siblings of the groom might give gifts to the bride. The gifts are usually jewellery, such as a necklace, bangles, or a bracelet and ring. The gifts are put on the bride by the givers themselves. For core nobles, a piece of *kain Jong sarat* and a set of clothing are also included (Jabatan Pusat Sejarah 1996). Then, the wedded couple sit and have dinner with their guests. A blessing prayer is recited to mark the end of the marriage rites.

### Uses of Traditional Textiles in other Malay Ethnic Groups.

At marriage, patterns of textile usage and their significance vary among other Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam. For instance, at Bisaya and Dusun ethnic group weddings, traditional woven textiles are hung as the backdrop of the dais. Textiles are used for beautification and as a display of wealth. Imported woven cloths might also be worn by the bride for her skirt, whereas black cotton is used for the blouse. The groom also wears the ethnic traditional costume and head gear. For wedding costumes, the tops are usually decorated with glitter. For bridal blouse, additional accessories known as *kubamban* (bell like accessories) are attached around the sleeves (see plate 75).



**Plate 75: Among the Bisaya and Dusun, traditional woven cloths were used to furnish the dais.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department.)

In the past, among the Belait ethnic group, the *kain betabur* design was the preferred one for traditional bridal clothes. At the arrival of the groom to the compound of his bride's house, two of the bride's relatives used a piece of red *Jong sarat* design of traditional woven cloth to shelter the groom as a sign of respect towards the groom (Noor Ehsan 2004:74). My informants told me that during the marriage rite, both bride and groom were then enveloped in a single piece of textile symbolising a blessing for a harmonious marriage. Cloths were also used to decorate the *tawak-tawak* (small gong used to summon people),



which were used as seats for the wedded couple. Among the Kedayan, traditional cloth was also used to decorate the wooden mortar which was used as seat for the wedding couple (see plate 77). Now, traditional textiles are commonly worn by other Malay ethnic groups for wedding attire and many families have adopted the Brunei Malay custom of presenting locally woven traditional textiles as part of the wedding exchange. My Dusun informant who married a Tutong woman told me that he gave his wife a piece of *kain Jong sarat* at their engagement, although he was not requested to do so. However, it is not unusual for traditional woven textile to be exchanged in inter-ethnic marriages with the Brunei Malay, as confirmed by my informants from all other Malay ethnic groups. At one inter-ethnic marriage between a Dusun groom and a Brunei Malay bride that I observed during my fieldwork, the groom presented his bride a piece of *kain Jong sarat* at the engagement (see plate 76). One of my Bisaya informants told me when her son married his Brunei Malay wife, not only did her son have to provide a piece of *kain Jong sarat*, but also two sets of wedding costumes of Brunei traditional woven cloths for the wedding gifts. These costumes were worn at their wedding ceremonies.



**Plate 76: The Dusun groom also gives a traditional woven textile for the wedding exchange.**

(Photo: Norazam Orang Kaya Maha Bijaya Haji Othman).



**Plate 77: Among the Kedayan, traditional woven cloth is used to decorate the wooden mortar for the wedding couple to sit on.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

In Brunei Malay wedding ceremonies, traditional woven cloths play a significant role as ceremonial garments and in gift exchange. Bed spreads, the fans (manual hand fan) and small pillows made with traditional woven cloths are conspicuously displayed during each event in the marriage rites. The fact that the traditional woven cloth is a substantial part of the bridewealth and cannot be replaced with money indicates its importance. Malays take into careful consideration the aesthetic value and the quality of the cloths when choosing both exchange gifts and furnishings. The practices not only express the symbolic meaning of making and strengthening social relations, but also the desire to give the wedding couple the treatment and care they deserve.

The usage of textiles in marriage rites is not only an attempt to objectify a sense of unity among the members of Malay society in Brunei Darussalam, but also to maintain a 'sense of continuity' (Renne 1995:83) with tradition. Traditional woven cloths are part of the Malay culture and are utilised in Brunei traditions; not observing such traditions seems to alienate one from her or his own roots. Indeed, the traditional cloths play important roles in tying together social relations. Indeed, social scientists and laypersons regularly describe 'society as [a] fabric, woven or knit together' (Schneider and Weiner 1989: 2). On the other hand, traditional woven cloths in Brunei society are used as an expression of interconnectedness in social relations. Traditional textiles are also used to display

the articulation of the society. Some members of the society manipulate the usage of such textiles to distinguish social and cultural identity. In addition, textiles are also used as a means of displaying difference as well as commonality. The adaptation of traditional woven cloths among the Malays in ceremonies indicates their common origin, although different ways of using the cloths show different ethnic backgrounds.

### **The Celebration of the New Mother and First Child**

In Brunei Darussalam, one ceremony welcomes the new mother and first born child. The ceremony is locally known as *Majlis mandi berlawat* (welcoming bathing ceremony). The ceremony is usually held forty days after the delivery. The ceremony is significant, as it marks the end of the confinement period for the mother, during which she is not allowed to do many things. Furthermore, the rite is intended to establish her new position in society as a mother (Van Gennep 1960: 41).

During the confinement period, the mother is not allowed to do things that she is normally permitted to do. She is relieved from certain religious obligations, such as prayers and fasting if she delivers in the month of Ramadhan, although she must subsequently fast after the confinement period as a substitute. She is also prohibited from having sexual relations with her husband during the period. She is required to perform certain rites to have the restrictions lifted, thus reintegrating her into normal life.

The most important rite to end the confinement period requires the mother to take a ritual bath (*mandi wajib*) in a mixture of herbs. Before she starts taking the bath, she has to recite an 'intention verse' in her heart signifying that she wants to purify herself from the state of being unclean. According to Islamic teaching, a newly delivered mother and women during menstruation are considered to be in an 'unclean' state. When these periods are over i.e. usually forty days for the mother and seven days for the menstruating woman, the women are required to take ritual bath. After the bath, the women are considered purified and are allowed to resume the activities they have been prohibited from doing.

During my fieldwork, I attended two separate *mandi berlawat* ceremonies held for my relatives. Both ceremonies had a similar format. At the ceremony, relatives and friends were invited. I was told in former times, only women were invited, but now men are invited too. Tents were erected to accommodate the guests, and food and drinks were served. At the event, the new mother was dressed in a traditional costume. The material for the costume was imported woven textile from Malaysia. An additional piece of locally traditional woven cloth for *kain kapit*, was also wrapped around her mid-body. She was adorned in traditional accessories, such as head gear, bracelet, necklace, ear rings and rings. The child was clothed in new attire and a piece of traditional woven cloth was wrapped around the baby's body (see plate 78). According to my informants from the Brunei ethnic group, both mother and child were clothed in their finest as a way of expressing the felicities of being a mother and her good fortune in bringing a new life to the world. In addition, according to them, it is the tradition for them to wear fine costume to celebrate such happy occasions.

At the event, religious chanting (*dikir*) was carried out by a group of women which consists of praise to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. The groups were seated in the living room of the house. At one point, they stood up and continued to chant as the new mother and her child came out of their room. The mother was accompanied by her mother-in-law who held the baby. She was seated on an ornate mat which was placed on the floor at the centre of the living room. Her child and mother-in-law sat next to her. The mat was a beautiful satin decorated with multi coloured beads, glitter and embroidered with gold or silver threads. At each of the mat's corners, a long candle was lit and put in a brass stand. While the mother and the child were seated, a few elderly relatives were invited to sprinkle rose water and pot-pourri, as well as smearing scented powder paste on the hands and forehead of the mother and her child. Then, they went out of the house and around the tents and shook hands with the female guests who also sprinkled rose water and pot-pourri and smeared scented powder paste on them. While shaking hands, the guests gave the mother envelopes containing money as gifts. When they had finished shaking hands, they went back into the

house. By that time, the chanting had also finished. A prayer was then read to bless the new mother and her child, as well as the whole ceremony. The guests were then invited to have a meal. Each guest was given a *campur* (takeaway), a container containing biscuits and other goodies.



**Plate 78: The celebration of the New Mother and her First Child.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

One of the ceremonies which I attended was also held concurrently with the *aqiqah* (a sacrifice performed in relation to the birth of a new baby). According to Islamic teaching, when a baby is newly born, the parents are called to sacrifice a sheep, cow, buffalo or goat. The quantity of animals to be sacrificed depends on the sex of the baby (two portions for a male and a portion for a female, where two portions are equivalent to one sheep or goat). Although they are not obliged to make the sacrifice, if the parents can afford it, they should fulfil their responsibility. The meat is cooked and distributed to people, especially among the needy. The *aqiqah* may be performed from the time the newly born baby is seven days old. However, in Brunei Darussalam, many people choose to perform it at the same time as the *majlis mandi berlawat*, as my relative did, and the meat of the sacrifice was served at the time. In addition, all the guests were given cooked meat for takeaway.

Child birth, particularly that of the first child is considered one of the most important events in Brunei society. It is celebrated to express gratitude to God for

His grace. Among Brunei society, having children is one of the most important achievements for a married couple. To some extent, a couple's inability to conceive is considered to be a disgrace. In former times, it was a matter of pride for a couple to have many children. Children are considered to bring fortune to the family. According to Malay custom, it is very important to have children, thus having someone to support the parents in their old age as well as having someone who will pray for the parents when they have died. In the Islamic perspective, having children enables the expansion of the Muslim population and continues the Islamic tradition. Therefore, inviting people to attend ceremonies like the end of confinement and *aqiqah* is one way of announcing the parent's good fortune and sharing it with other people, especially relatives and friends.

### **Circumcision and Puberty.**

Circumcision is another rite that is performed in Brunei society, especially among the Muslims. According to Islamic teaching, this practice began with the Prophet Abraham when he was commanded by Allah to circumcise himself. Among the Muslims in Brunei Darussalam, where the Sunni Islamic Shafie school of thought is followed, circumcision is practised on boys, whereas girls are incised; however, when it is performed differs according to sex. Girls' incision is carried out when they are still toddlers of not more than two years old, whereas boys are commonly circumcised at the age of ten. Circumcision for males is obligatory, as it has to do with purity, one of the conditions of worship. According to Islamic teaching, if the foreskin of the penis is not circumcised, it is possible when the urine comes out of the urethra that some urine may remain there; when the foreskin is squeezed, drops of urine might come out, thus causing impurity. When someone is in an impure condition, worship is not valid. There have been debates relating to female incision. However, according to Islamic scholar Abu Dawud, Prophet Muhammad allowed females to be incised, as it regulates their sexual desire (Ahmad 2000). Still, the prophet forbade severity in female incision that might impair the woman's ability to enjoy sexual relations.

In Brunei Darussalam, a ceremony commemorating circumcision/incision is celebrated. The parents usually hold a celebration after the ritual when the circumcised child has already healed. Relatives and friends are invited. Tents are erected to accommodate the guests, and food and drinks are served. For girls, it is usual to celebrate the function while they are still toddlers. They are dressed in a new clothes and a piece of traditional woven cloth is wrapped around their bodies (see plate 79). No particular colour or motif is required. However, the traditional woven cloth given by her father to her mother for the wedding exchange is commonly used to wrap the toddler. Boys are dressed in traditional costumes similar to those worn by a groom.



**Plate 79: The girl was wrapped with traditional cloth at her incision ceremony.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Mohd Khaliddin Haji Wahsalfelah).

At a circumcision celebration, a group of people engage in a religious chant. Normally, if the ceremony is for girls, a women's chanting group is invited, whereas men are invited for boys. A mixed gendered group would be invited if the function is for both sexes. The chanting group is seated in the living room, but if the ceremony is for both sexes, they are seated separately. The start of chanting marks the beginning of the ceremony. At one point in the chanting, they stand up; this indicates that the procession can come out of the room and meet the guests. The girls are usually accompanied by their mothers and female

relatives, whereas the fathers and male relatives come out with the boys. It is also not uncommon for the father to accompany the child/children when meeting the male guests first, then the mother would take over when the time come to meet the female guests. They shake hands with the guests, who are then sprinkled with pot-pourri and smeared with scented powder paste on the forehead. When they have finished, the chanting stopped. A prayer is then read to bless the celebrants. After that, the guests are invited to eat, and they are given a container filled with sweets to take home. Traditionally, each guest was also given a *bunga telur*, a stick decorated with an artificial flower and a boiled egg attached to it. Now, only some families maintain this custom, as the *bunga telur* has been replaced with other forms of souvenirs, such as porcelain cups and saucers, and crystal glass.

Although some people like to hold an individual circumcision ceremony, it is common for parents to combine with close relatives who have children of the same age. The ceremony is held at the residence of one of the parents. It is also not unusual for such ceremonies to be combined with a wedding ceremony, especially during powdering night ceremony. While I did my observation at powdering night ceremony for Abdul Aziz, it was combined with an incision ceremony for his niece. The girl was dressed in a gown made from traditional woven cloth (see plate 80). At the incision ceremony held for my niece, when she was about one year old in June 2003, she wore an imported gown, but a piece of green *kain Jong sarat* was wrapped around her body (see plate 79). Her mother used the *kain Jong sarat* of her wedding exchange. Unfortunately, there was no circumcision ceremony held for boys while I was doing my fieldwork, but I remember when my brother got married in 1997, a circumcision ceremony for our nephews was combined with his powdering night ceremony.





**Plate 80: Traditional cloth was made into a gown and worn by the girl at her incision ceremony.**

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah).

A ceremony marking puberty is also celebrated in Brunei society. The function is similar to the circumcision ceremony, as it also involves religious chanting and prayer recitation. However, the puberty ceremony is more commonly held for girls, probably because the onset of this stage is less complicated and physiological changes often more visible for girls than boys (Van Gennep 1960). A girl's puberty is established when she has had her first menstruation, whereas the boy's is marked when he first emits his semen. Boy's puberty may be closely associated with circumcision, since it is about that age that boys tend to have their first emission.

The puberty celebration which I observed was held for my three young female relatives, which was combined with the *majlis mandi berlawat* of their sister-in-law in February 2002. They were dressed in white traditional costume. Each of them had a piece of traditional woven cloth of different colours wrapped around her waist (see plate 81). There is no specification of the colour and motifs of the costume; however, vibrant colours are usually preferred. One of them wore black, another one wore red and the other wore blue *kain Jong sarat*. Their heads were adorned with tiara and they also wore jewellery. Their faces were also made up.



**Plate 81: The girls wearing a *kain kapit* of traditional cloths at their puberty ceremony.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

The circumcision and puberty ceremonies which are known as the process of coming of age or *baligh*, the process of transition to adulthood, are significant events among both male and female Muslims. According to Islamic teaching, the transition grants them roles and responsibilities as an adult. These responsibilities are not limited to the individual's role as a member of the society, but also constitute obligations to God and are connected to the performance of acts of devotion (Newland 2000). In addition, such ceremonies also mark the socially recognised transition to sexual maturity. For boys, the transition enables them to enter a stage where they can later seek wives, whereas for girls, this ceremony provides them with the new status of being a woman and therefore announces their maturity to possible suitors.

### **Funerals.**

Funeral rites in Brunei society are shaped by system of belief and *adat* or social custom. Muslims are largely influenced by Islamic teachings, as evidenced by such practices as their enveloping of the corpse in a shroud, performing a

special prayer and the reciting of verses from the Quran. Islamic teachings encourage the use of white cloths as a shroud, although the use of other colours is not banned (Hassan 1991:115). At a funeral in Brunei Darussalam, traditional cloth is never used as shroud, but may be used as a top cover of the corpse while waiting for it to be bathed and enveloped in shrouds as well as before placing the body in the coffin.

While I was home for my fieldwork, two of my uncles passed away. One of them died in August 2002, while the other one passed away in February 2003. At both events, I did not see any traditional woven cloths being used, but imported plaid design (*kain tajung*) materials were used to cover the corpse while waiting for it to be bathed. After the body had been bathed, it was enveloped in white shrouds. Once the deceased was put in the coffin, a few pieces of batik or plaid designed cloths, followed by a piece of cloth decorated with verses from the Quran, were used to cover the coffin. My informants told me that for some families, especially among the nobles, traditional woven cloths may be used instead of the batik or plaid designed cloths. For instance, at the funeral of the late Sultan of Brunei Darussalam who passed away in 1986 and the present Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's brother-in-law, who had just very recently passed away in December 2004 (<http://www.brudirect.com>, accessed 14 December 2004), the coffin was covered with several pieces of traditional woven cloths. In addition, textiles decorated with Quranic verses were also laid on the top (see plate 82).

Among Muslims, due to stronger Islamic influence, textiles decorated with verses from the Quran are now gaining in popularity. Cloths used to cover the coffin are not buried with the deceased; rather they are taken back to the house. Sometimes, the cloths are stored for future use, but it is not appropriate to use them in marriage exchanges. At other times families may decide to give them to people who have helped in organising the funeral rites.

White cotton cloths available at the market are normally used as shrouds. When the deceased has been bathed, the body is then wrapped with cloths. It is sufficient to wrap the body with one layer of cloth, however, in normal practice, the number of layers of cloths varies in accordance with the gender of the

deceased (Hassan 1991: 115); a male is wrapped in three layers following the practice when Prophet Mohammad passed away, his body was wrapped in three layers of white cloths, whereas a female in five layers (Hassan 1986:281-282). When the enshrouding process is completed, then the body is again covered with layers of cloths on top of it. Traditional woven cloths may be used as the uppermost cover, especially among the nobles. However, among the commoners, other kinds of cloths, such as batik and cloths of plaid design (*kain tajung*), are popularly used. According to my informant, although there is no specific rule of the types of textiles used at funerals, the use of different types of cloth may indicate the gender of the deceased. Batik cloths are usually used if the deceased was a female, whereas plaid design cloths are used for males.



**Plate 82: Traditional cloths were used to envelop the coffin and textile decorated with verses from the Quran was used for the top cover.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department).

After the process of enshrouding the corpse has been completed, the corpse is laid in a spacious room for the special prayer. The prayer is performed by a group of men led by an *Imam* (prayer leader). When the group has finished the prayer, the family members of the deceased give it a kiss on the forehead and pay their last respects. Then the corpse is put into the coffin. The coffin is covered with cloths. When it is ready, several, especially close male relatives carry the coffin and proceed to leave the house to the cemetery. On the way out to the main door, verses from the Quran are recited by carriers and others in

attendance. The recitations of the Quran are intended for the deceased so that he or she will be blessed by Allah.

After the funeral, *bertahlil* or a special religious chanting ceremony commemorating the deceased is held. For the Malay Muslims in Brunei Darussalam, the ceremony is usually held on three consecutive days, and then followed by another one on the seventh day after the funeral. On the fortieth day, another *bertahlil* ceremony is held, followed by another one on the hundredth day. In addition, a *bertahlil* ceremony is also held annually. My cousins also held *bertahlil* ceremony for my uncles. At both occasions, due to my short stay in Brunei Darussalam, I only managed to attend until the seventh day after their funeral. Annually, usually at the end of *Sya'ban* (before the month of Ramadhan in the Islamic calendar), my family also hold a *bertahlil* ceremony for my grandparents, who died when I was younger.

In such ceremonies, the family invites relatives and friends to read the prayer for the deceased. The prayer recitation is led by a man who is well versed in religious knowledge and religious chanting. Muslims believe that such prayers will help lighten the burden of the departed in the grave. After the prayer, the family serves food and drinks to the guests, signifying the host's gratitude for their attendance and prayers.

During the ceremony, the guests usually wear traditional attire. The female wears a *baju kurung* or *baju kebaya*, and head-scarf. The male wears *baju cara Melayu*, a *sinjang*, usually of a traditional woven cloths wrapped between the waist and knees over the suit, and a black *songkok* on the head. The *sinjang* worn at such a ceremony is usually less elaborate than that worn on festive occasions. In conformity with Islamic ethics, it is appropriate to wear humble, yet decent and sombre clothing, although there is no specific prescription about the type and colour of clothing. During the mourning period, members of the deceased's family are encouraged not to over adorn themselves.

The dressing or enshrouding of the corpse reflects the identity of the individual and group beliefs, as there are evidently different ways of dressing the corpse. The funeral rites for the non-Muslim Malays are performed in

accordance with their customs and belief system. For example, in Dusun funeral rites, the deceased is dressed in his or her best attire. However, the clothes are worn inside-out. The Dusun believe that the corpse should be dressed in such a way because the deceased is going to the other world that is the opposite of this world (Bantong 1993:141). The corpse is then covered with unused or new pieces of batik or *kain tajung* (plaid-design cloth), while waiting to be placed in the coffin. According to my Dusun informant, at Dusun funerals traditional woven cloths may also be used to cover the coffin, especially among those with higher economic status; such cloths are used by the family of the deceased to display their wealth. For them, traditional woven cloths which were used to cover the coffin must belong to the deceased or his or her immediate family and must not be loaned from other people.

Informants from other Malay ethnic groups, such as the Tutong and the Brunei, perceived the use of traditional woven cloths during funeral rites as paying a sense of respect to the deceased. They also mentioned that traditional cloths are also used to display the social and economic status of the deceased and his or her family.

### **Influences of Foreign Textiles.**

Beginning in the 1970s until the mid-1980s, it was quite fashionable among Malays especially if the groom worked in the military and police forces, to wear a Western style of wedding attire. Many males chose to wear their uniform at their weddings, thus requiring the bride to wear a Western wedding gown as a complement. At that time, the military and police forces were under the command of the British, who encouraged the wearing of military uniforms for weddings, especially among the higher ranking officers. Western style gowns were commonly worn by girls during celebrations, such as *mandi berlawat* and circumcision ceremonies. However, locally woven cloths continued to be favoured for the wedding exchange and other events in the wedding ceremony. The locally woven traditional textiles were also worn for the *kain kapit*.

In the mid 1980s, especially after Independence and perhaps due to process of 'reMalayanisation', the use of Western style clothing for weddings declined among the Malays. Wedded couples now choose to wear traditional Malay costume. Other than local traditional woven cloths, certain types of imported textiles, such as traditional woven cloths from Malaysia, Indonesia and India, and lacy fabrics are increasingly preferred for ceremonial costumes. The appearance of imported traditional textiles is quite similar to the local ones, so they are easily accepted; because they are less costly to buy in comparison to the locally woven ones, they are in high demand. A complete set of intricately designed imported traditional cloths for a couple may cost as much as B\$1000.00, whereas simply designed locally woven cloths would cost around B\$3000.00 for a couple. More intricately designed locally woven fabrics would be as expensive as B\$15,000.00 for the clothing for the bride and groom. Since the purchase of locally woven cloths requires a considerable outlay, the use of locally woven traditional clothing is a sign of the considerable economic status of the purchaser.

One recent commercial development has been the establishment of boutiques providing rental services for wedding and ceremonial clothes. Such boutiques usually use imported fabrics because the profit margin is greater. Increasingly, couples are renting wedding clothes rather than purchasing them. Because of the series of ceremonies which constitute a wedding, couples need to buy more than one set of clothing and this imposes an economic burden most ordinary people cannot afford. As the rental for wedding attire is the same regardless of whether the cloths are imported or locally woven, boutique owners get more profit if imported textiles are used to make the wedding attire. The rental for wedding attire for a couple usually costs about B\$300.00, but many boutiques offer a package price of about B\$2000.00, which includes several sets of wedding attire that can be worn throughout the series of marriage ceremonies.

During funeral rites, imported textiles, such as Indonesian batiks and plaids, are also commonly used to cover the corpse and the coffin, whereas white cotton is commonly used for shrouds. With the influence of the Islamic faith among Bruneians, cloths purchased in Mecca and decorated with Quranic verses

in Arabic script are more commonly being used to cover the coffin. For those who have not had the chance to perform the Haj, these cloths are usually loaned by relatives or friends.

### **Conclusion.**

In this chapter, I have shown how traditional textiles play an essential part as ceremonial dressing, exchange, furnishing and decorations at rites of passage. Among Bruneians, these rites not only mark the transition between an individual's life stages, but they also reinforce the dominant religious views and cultural values of the society. I suggest the signification of continuity in these rites has provided avenues for the use of traditional textiles. Traditional textiles are used to mark social and cultural identity. Traditional textiles are also used to express the adherence and reverence towards the tradition which has been inherited for generations. Islamic teachings have been playing a significant role in ensuring certain rites of passage are performed. Thus, many of these rites are well preserved and others have revived.

The continuation of these rite-of-passage traditions can also be regarded as conforming to the religious stipulation, as well as a manifestation of Malay cultural practice. There certainly have been changes as imported textiles are now being used to replace the locally woven traditional cloths. However, the use of locally woven traditional cloths, especially in wedding exchange, remains significant. The conspicuous utilisation of the locally woven traditional cloths is being manipulated as a sign or display of wealth, as well as social prominence. The following chapter deals with the significance of traditional textiles in the Brunei royal court.



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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> A whole set of a dress usually consist of top and bottom clothing. It is not sewn, cloth for a set of dress is usually measuring of a four meters.

<sup>2</sup> Kain jong sarat (kain tenunan) atu digunakan sebagai hantaran sebagai tanda pertunangan kepada orang kawin, jadi barang kana pinta ...kalau arah kami kami pinta tu...kalau inda ada inda mau...inda mampu bah tu...mun kan bebini ani mesti ada usin, mesti tebal kain jong sarat...

<sup>3</sup> *Galak jua rasanya kalau inda ada, nya orang si anu ah menghantar berian inda ada kain jong sarat. Orang indada kah, apakah, inda ada pendapatan banyak*

<sup>4</sup> Before the proclamation, she was known as Yang Mulia Dayangku Sarah.

## **Chapter Six.**

### **The Courtly Dress Code: Representation of Power and Marker of Status.**

#### **Introduction.**

The significance of traditional woven textiles lies largely in the royal court. In chapter three I discussed briefly the ceremonial clothing worn when attending royal court functions. In Brunei Darussalam, royal court functions include the installation of a new sultan to the throne (*Istiadat Berpuspa*), the Sultan's birthday anniversary (*Hari Keputeraan Sultan*), royal weddings (*Perkahwinan Diraja*) and the investiture ceremony (*Istiadat Penganugerahan Gelaran*).

According to Siti Zainon (1997), up to the sixteenth century traditional woven cloth was used only for royal attire and worn during official and traditional functions by the nobles in the Malay world. She claims yellow and white are the usual colour worn by the ruler, whereas other colours, such as blue, red and green are popularly worn by other nobles. Pink was common in the royal court of Perak, Malaysia. However, in Brunei Darussalam, the use of such cloths in the court was extended to non-noble dignitaries as noted by Pigafetta, Magellan's chronicler, who visited Brunei in 1521 (Nicholl 1975). Andaya (1992: 411) asserts that such displays were a major reinforcement of the claims made by the Brunei ruler to stand as the region's overlord. In the contemporary context, the use of traditional woven textiles as part of the ceremonial dress, especially in royal court ceremonies prevails and signifies social and political rank, and the office held by certain officials. These distinctions can be identified by way of colours and motifs of the traditional woven cloths.

When a title is conferred upon an official, he is also given material acknowledgment which includes clothing and regalia. These material acknowledgments are considered as a gift to honour the official and consolidate his social and political relationships; they are also used as a tangible expression of leadership (Layton 1981), as such objects are conferred upon the officials who have been admitted to a certain level in the political system. They are also

‘symbols of continuity or succession’ (Cohn 1989: 313) transmitted from the giver, the Sultan in the case of Brunei Darussalam, to the recipient, i.e. the appointed and inaugurated officials.

This chapter examines the use and display of traditional woven textiles in royal court ceremonies. I use an account of the present Sultan’s birthday anniversary held on the 15 July 2002, which I attended and a general investiture ceremony to show the role played by traditional woven textiles in the royal court ceremonies in distinguishing the status of the wearer in the social and political hierarchy. Traditional woven cloths play an important role in court dress and as part of the regalia for nobles and non-noble officials. The use of traditional woven textiles to represent the power of the bearer, as well as their use as status symbol, will also be explored.

### **Birthday Celebration of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam.**

Sultan Haji Hassanali Bolkiah is the 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei Darussalam. He was installed as the ruler of Brunei in 1968 when his father, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien, the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan, decided to abdicate the throne. The 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan was born on the 15 July 1946; since his installation, 15 July has been a public holiday in Brunei Darussalam. Festivals to celebrate the Sultan’s birthday usually go on for about two weeks beginning on the eve of his birthday and ending at end of July. Many functions are organised nationwide in conjunction with the Sultan’s birthday anniversary.

My second phase of fieldwork was conducted from June until September 2002. This time frame was purposely designed to enable me to do my participant observation at the celebration of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam’s fifty-sixth birthday anniversary. Prior to engaging in observation, I applied for permission from the Grand Chamberlain Office. It is a normal procedure to seek approval from relevant authorities in order to gain access and for security reasons. The Office approved my application and allowed my observations. I was considered as media personnel. I appointed a research assistant to help me take photographs at the event. My research assistant and I were required to report and obtain a

temporary press accreditation pass at the Department of Information. We were briefed regarding the code of conduct at the events. We were also told to conform to the dress code for which we were required to wear black national attire or lounge suit at the major events.

The beginning of the festival was marked by the performance of *maghrib* (sunset) and *Isya* (night) prayers in all *masjid* (mosques) and *surau* (prayer halls) in the state held on the eve of the Sultan's birthday, 14 July 2002. By Islamic reckoning the eve is already part of the birthday. The public was encouraged to join the mass prayers. The Sultan and his male siblings participated, along with his subjects, at the Jame' Asr Hassanah Bolkiah mosque. The next day, 15 July 2002, two major events, held annually to officially mark the royal birthday, took place. The first event was the 'Royal March Past' ceremony (*Istiadat Perbarisan Diraja*). The second event was *Istiadat Mengadap dan Pengurniaan Pingat dan Bintang-Bintang Kebesaran* (Granting audience and bestowing of medals and honours ceremony).

#### ***Istiadat Perbarisan Diraja.***

The *Istiadat Perbarisan Diraja* began at eight o'clock in the morning and was held at the *Taman* (park) Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin, located in the heart of Brunei Darussalam's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. Local and foreign guests attended the ceremony. Most of the local guests were dignitaries, high ranking and senior officials from the government and private sector. In addition, siblings, children and other close relatives of traditional noble and non-noble officials also attended. The foreign guests were the ambassadors and consulate officials working in Brunei Darussalam, as well as special guests from the neighbouring and other states. The invitations were issued by the Protocol unit at the Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara, with the approval of the Sultan.

At this event, guests were seated according to their social and political status, which was determined by the Protocol unit. The guests were divided into different areas of the provided stands. Some were seated in the stand parallel to the grandstand where the Sultan, the Crown Prince and the Viziers were seated,

the rest were seated at the stand on the other side of the *Taman*. The dress codes were specified in the invitation card.

At all royal court events the colour of the dress was specified in accordance with the status of the wearer, as well as the time when the function was held. Generally, all guests were required to put on black for day functions and white for evening ones. Those who had been awarded medals were required to wear them. Malay guests were directed to wear the *baju Kebangsaan* (national costume), which is also known as *baju cara Melayu* (Malay traditional dress), whereas non-Malays could wear a formal Western style of clothing. For males, the *baju Kebangsaan* consists of a tunic, a pair of trousers, *sinjang* of traditional woven cloth and headgear. The headgear may be either a black *songkok* (black velvet cap), *dastar* (specially folded headgear from traditional woven cloth), *tengkolok* (white skullcap) or *serban* (turban). Other forms of male headdress were not acceptable. For females *baju Kebangsaan* is either *baju kurung* or *baju kebaya*. *Baju kurung* consists of a loose tunic with long sleeves and a loose long skirt, whereas *baju kebaya* consists of a slightly body fitting top and long skirt. The wearing of a *tudung* (headscarf) among women was encouraged, especially among the Muslims.

Traditional or royal dignitaries wore different types, pattern, designs, motifs and colours of traditional woven *sinjang*, *arat* (belt) and *dastar* (head-gear) in accordance with their rank. Each of the male dignitaries carried a *keris* (Malay dagger). Among the traditional noble officials, only the *Cheteria* are provided with uniforms of ceremonial dress for royal court functions. The traditional textiles for the *Cheteria* have the same pattern and design for all levels, however, rank can be identified by a difference in colour. The cloth is a *Jong sarat* design decorated with *bunga cheteria bersiku keluang* (the flying fox motif). The colour for the chief *Cheteria* is dark purple, light purple is for the *Cheteria* four (see plate 83), additional<sup>1</sup> *Cheteria* under *Cheteria* 4 wear green with red stripes (see plate 84), *Cheteria* eight wear orange (see plate 85), *Cheteria* sixteen wear blue (see plate 86), additional *Cheteria* under *Cheteria* sixteen wear black with red stripes (see plate 87), and *Cheteria* thirty two wear pink (see plate 88).



**Plate 83: Part of ceremonial dress for *Cheteria 4*.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 84: Part of the ceremonial dress of the additional *Cheteria 4*.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 85: Ceremonial dress for *Cheteria* 8.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 86: Ceremonial dress for *Cheteria* 16.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).





**Plate 87: Ceremonial dress for additional *Cheteria* 16.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 88: Ceremonial dress for *Cheteria* 32.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

Non-noble traditional officials can be divided into three categories. The level of offices can be distinguished through the colours and motifs of their ceremonial *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar*. Different colours and motifs are used to decorate their ceremonial costume. Higher non-noble officials are also ranked into 4, 8, 16 and 32. However, unlike the noble office of *Cheteria*, there is no distinction in the colour and design for their uniforms within this office. The



traditional cloth for their uniform is a scattered pattern arrangement decorated with *bunga butang arab gegati* (rhombus and button floral motifs) in pink colour (see plate 89).



**Plate 89: the ceremonial dress for the higher non-noble officials.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The lower ranking non-noble traditional officials include the *Manteri Istana* (Officials of the Palace), *Manteri Agama* (Traditional Religious Officials), *Manteri Dagang*<sup>2</sup> (Officials of Foreigners), *Manteri Hulubalang* (Officials of Defence) and *Manteri Pedalaman* (Officials of Inland). The traditional cloth for the *Manteri Istana* and *Manteri Hulubalang* are similar in colour and design. The colour of the cloth is purple with a scattered pattern arrangement decorated with *bunga tampuk manggis* (the calyx of mangosteen flower) motif (see plate 90), whereas the *Manteri Pedalaman* uniform is a blue with scattered pattern arrangement decorated with *bunga kembang setahun* (all year round blooming flower) motif (see plate 91). The base colour for their costume is scarlet. Traditional religious ministers and officials have been prescribed an Arabic styled long dress known as *jubah* and headdress, *serban* (turban). The colour of the *jubah* depends on the time of the occasion, black for day and white for evening.



**Plate 90: Ceremonial dress of the *Manteri Hulubalang* (Lower Non-Noble Officials).**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

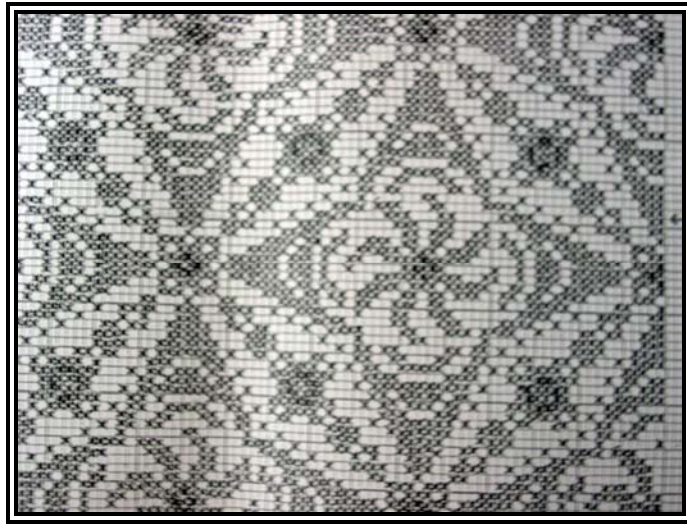


**Plate 91: Ceremonial Dress for the *Manteri Pedalaman* (officials of Interior).**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah)

The state dignitaries or modern administrative ministers, deputy ministers and other senior officials also had to wear the ceremonial costumes prescribed for them. The colours, as well as the designs of their ceremonial dress, varied according to their position and rank. The ministers and deputy ministers of the cabinet wear woven cloths of similar design and motif for their *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar*, which is of *Si Lubang bangsi* design decorated with *bunga berputar kembang bertatah* (rotating bloom with multi coloured motif) (see plate 92). The

colour of the cloth for the ministers is golden olive (see plate 93), whereas the deputy ministers wear silvery blue coloured supplementary weft cloth (see plate 94). Senior officials in the government sector wear a traditional cloth of *Jong sarat* design decorated with *bunga teratai* (lotus motif) (see plate 95). The colour of the cloth is maroon. Traditional cloth of similar design and colour is attached to the lapel and the sleeves of the costume and for the *kain kapit* worn by the female senior officers.



**Plate 92: The sketch of *Kain Si Lubang bangsi bunga berputar kembang bertatah*, design used for the ceremonial dress of the Cabinet Ministers and Deputy Ministers.**

(Courtesy of the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre).



**Plate 93: One of the Cabinet Minister.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 94: One of the Deputy Cabinet Minister.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 95: Sketch of *Kain Jong sarat bunga teratai*, design used for ceremonial dress of the senior administrative officials.**

(Courtesy of the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre).

The officers who bear royal regalia for the Sultan and his siblings also wore a uniform. They assembled behind where the Sultan and his siblings were seated. Each of the Sultan's siblings had four officers carrying the royal regalia. The regalia were the royal umbrella, a sword and shield, a spear and a golden betel container locally known as *kaskol*. The *kaskol* were wrapped with traditional cloth. The colour of the wrapping cloths reflected the status of the royal members. For instance, the Sultan's *kaskol* wrapping was yellow supplementary weft cloth, whereas the *Pengiran Perdana Wazir* (Supreme Vizier) and *Pengiran Bendahara's* (second Vizier) ones were in white.

The royal regalia bearers were clothed in a black traditional costume, but the colour of their *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar* differed in accordance with the rank of the person whose regalia they were bearing. For instance, the officers bearing the regalia for the Sultan wore a black background traditional woven cloth decorated with golden thread of *kain berturus* (vertical) design *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar*. The uniform of the regalia bearers for the Supreme Vizier, *Pengiran Perdana Wazir*, and second Vizier, *Pengiran Bendahara*, was white. Both cloths were of

*kain berturus* design, but different motifs were used for the decoration. The *Pengiran Perdana Wazir's* regalia bearers wore *kain bepakan*, i.e. the wefts were alternately woven with gold threads, thus producing shimmering effect to the material, whereas the *Pengiran Bendahara's* regalia bearers wore *kain biasa*. In *kain biasa*, gold thread was not use for the weft, thus giving a matte effect to the material. In this case, it appears to me the difference in shimmering effect on the cloths signifies the different rank of the person on which the regalia are borne.

Apart from the royal regalia bearers, there were also two traditional commandants locally known as *Panglima Asgar* (Defence Commandant) and *Panglima Raja* (Royal Commandant). On the way from the palace to the *Taman*, the vehicle in which these traditional commandants were riding preceded the Sultan's. When they arrived at the *Taman*, these commanders disembarked from their vehicle and stood guard at the either side of staircase of the grandstand where the Sultan and his siblings were seated. The commandants were dressed in a scarlet traditional costume with a purple traditional woven *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar* designed with *bunga bertabur* pattern and *bunga tampuk manggis* (calyx of mangosteen flower) motif (see plate 96). The *Panglima Asgar* carried the royal weapons of *kelasak and kampilan* i.e. the royal sword and shield, whereas the *Panglima Raja* carried *pemuras and kampilan* i.e. the royal gun and cartridge container.





**Plate 96: The traditional commandants wearing ceremonial costume of scarlet suit and purple *dastar*, *sinjang* and *arat* of traditional woven cloths.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

Officers from the Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara and the Grand Chamberlain Office were also dressed in uniform. The design and colour of their clothes reflected their respective offices. For instance, the officials from the Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara wear maroon coloured material with a vertical design (see plate 97). The material is also decorated with scattered arranged floral motifs.



**Plate 97: One of the officials from the Royal Customary Office accompanying the *Cheteria* (in blue *dastar* and *sinjang*) while waiting for other guests.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The Royal officers were dressed in their ceremonial costume and the rest of the guests were dressed as specified. The Sultan and his siblings wore military uniforms. However, the colour of their attire and head-gear differed. The Sultan wore a white top and a pair of black trousers. He also wore a red sash across his upper body, an aiguillette on his chest, epaulettes on his shoulders and a pair of red decorations attached to his collar. His *songkok* was a dark green base with golden stripes around the middle and at the lowest edge, and an emblematic frontlet was attached at the left corner. He had several medals attached to the left side of his upper body, and he carried a sword in his left hand.

*Pengiran Muda Mahkota* (The Crown Prince) was dressed in a navy blue top decorated with a golden design on the sleeves, dark maroon trousers, a yellow sash across his upper body, an aiguillette, epaulettes on his shoulders and a maroon hat. His hat was decorated with a silver frontlet, *tara*, attached at the



centre. He was also wearing several medals attached on his left upper body and held a sword in his left hand.

Prince Mohamed, the second brother of the Sultan, who holds positions as the Supreme Vizier *Pengiran Perdana Wazir* and the Minister of Foreign Affairs was among the audience. He was clothed in a military uniform. He wore a white top, maroon trousers, a golden coloured sash around his waist and yellow one across his upper body, an aiguillette, epaulettes on his shoulders and a maroon hat. A golden frontlet was attached to the centre of his hat. He also had his medals attached to his left upper body and held a sword in his left hand.

The third brother of the Sultan, Prince Sufri, is the second Vizier, *Pengiran Bendahara*. He was dressed in traditional costume, black background supplementary weft *sinjang*, *dastar* and *arat* of *si Lubang bangsi* design. He also wore a yellow sash across his upper body and a medal attached to his left side.

At the march past ceremony, the Sultan granted an audience to the processions of participating uniformed forces, such as the Royal Army Force, the Royal Police Force and other government departments (see plate 98). Other uniformed organisations, including the Scouts, Red Crescent, the Girl Guides, the Army and Police cadets, also participated.



**Plate 98: The march past event.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

At the Sultan's arrival, the ceremony began with the *hormat diraja* or paying royal respect to the Sultan led by the Lieutenant Colonel in charge, followed by the playing of the national anthem by a combined Army and Police orchestra. At the same time as the national anthem was played, a twenty-one cannon salute was also fired. After the national anthem, the Sultan inspected the troops. Then, the forces completed their march past while the band continued to play. There was also an Air Force flyover. The march past ceremony ended when the national anthem was again played. The event lasted for one and a half hours.

***Istiadat Mengadap dan Pengurniaan Pingat dan Bintang-Bintang Kebesaran.***

When we reached the palace, we were directed to go to the dining hall before going to the ceremonial hall, *Balai Indera Buana* (Heaven of the Universe Hall). Upon arrival, all the guests were served with meal set up in a buffet-style. After we took our meal, my research assistant and I headed to the ceremonial hall. Before entering the hall, I took the opportunity to observe the guests and their clothing. I asked my research assistant to take photos of some of the guests. Then, we went into the hall and headed to one of the reporter's corners which were provided especially for reporters and camera crews covering the event. There were several corners provided, and we took the one nearer to the royal dais located at the right side of the hall.

The ceremony at the palace started at 10.30 in the morning. It was telecast live across the nation by the national broadcasting station, Radio and Television Brunei. At this ceremony, the Sultan granted medals and bestowed honours upon selected persons. Special committees recommended selected persons and officers to be given the honour or medal and the Sultan approved their choice. Titles, for example *Dato* (which is equivalent to 'Sir' in the United Kingdom), and medals were honoured to those who had contributed to the development of the nation. The ceremony was attended by many guests who had been invited to the earlier event at the *Taman Omar Ali Saifuddien*. The guests were dressed in costumes similar to those they had worn earlier. However, at this event, female guests wore

an additional black<sup>3</sup> *kain kapit* of traditional woven textiles around their mid-bodies over their traditional costume. *Kain kapit* is a part of ceremonial dress for women, especially when attending royal court functions. Senior female officers in government departments wore the same specified colour and design of *kain kapit* as their male counterparts (see plate 99).



**Plate 99: Female guests are required to wear *kain kapit* when attending royal court ceremonies. The lady in front is one of the female senior officials in her ceremonial dress. Her *kain kapit* is specially designed for senior officials.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The Sultan changed from his military uniform into a five-piece suit of traditional style. The suit was made from traditional woven cloth. He wore a pastel purple coloured suit, *sinjang*, *dastar* and *arat* of a similar colour and design (see plate 100). In addition, a yellow sash was fastened across the Sultan's upper body. At the centre of his *dastar*, a brooch-like crown, *tara*, was attached. His *keris* (Malay dagger) was inserted into his *sinjang* of his front centre and he had several medals attached to his left upper body.

At this event, the *Raja Isteri* (Queen), the *Pengiran Isteri*<sup>4</sup> (the second wife of the Sultan) and the Sultan's daughters and his female siblings were also present. They were dressed in traditional fashion in various colours. At this event, I observed only the wives of the Sultan wore tiaras, whereas the Sultan's daughters and his female siblings wore a headscarf.



**Plate 100: The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam and his wives during his fifty-sixth birthday anniversary.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The ceremony began with a recital of a verse from the Quran, Al-Fatihah. It was followed by a royal speech by the Sultan. Later, the Sultan awarded medals to the selected persons (see plate 101). When the names of the recipients were announced, they marched into the hall escorted by several men bearing the royal swords, shields and spears. Most recipients were dressed in the national costume. The escorts were also clothed in black traditional uniform, including supplementary weft black *sinjang*, a yellow sash across the upper body and a black *songkok* upon the head. About fifty people received medals from the Sultan on this particular occasion. Some of them were honoured with the titles *Dato* for males and *Datin Paduka* for females. Most recipients wore black traditional dress, however, there were also some of them dressed in formal Western suit and military uniforms. Royal and state dignitaries who were honoured in this ceremony wore their ceremonial attire in accordance with their office and rank.



**Plate 101: The Sultan of Brunei awarding a medal to one of the recipients.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

During the presentation of the medals, the Sultan was assisted by officials from the Grand Chamberlain Office (see plate 101). The office is headed by a traditional noble official, an additional *Cheteria* 16. He was inaugurated with the title *Pengiran Penggawa Laila Bentara Istiadat Diraja Dalam Istana*. He is responsible for the protocol organisation of certain events held at the Palace. At this function, he wore a black traditional costume, black background supplementary weft *sinjang* with golden and red stripes, his *arat* and *dastar* were of identical design with the other *ceteria*. He also wore an additional yellow sash across his upper body, several medals, epaulettes on his shoulders and a pair of special collar ornaments bearing the royal emblem. The other officials assisting the Grand Chamberlain wore a uniform specially designed for them. The *sinjang*, *arat* and *dastar* were maroon background supplementary weft with green stripes. The fabric was decorated with a combination of *bunga putar* (rotating flower) and zigzag motifs.

The end of the ceremony was marked by the recitation of a prayer by the State Mufti. The Mufti was dressed in his official black *jubah*. The guests were not allowed to leave the hall until the Sultan and other members of the royal family had left.

There are many other royal court ceremonies where special costumes are worn, such as the installation of the king to the throne (*Istiadat Berpuspa*), the proclamation of the Crown Prince, royal weddings and investiture ceremonies (*Istiadat Pengurniaan Gelaran*). In the following section, I describe an investiture ceremony. Each ceremony for investiture has the same format regardless of the rank of office bestowed upon the officials. Nobles and non-nobles are treated similarly, as I will show, although certain features mark differences among ranks.

### **Investiture Ceremony.**

In April and May 2004, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam consented to confer traditional titles upon both noble and non-noble officials. Seven separate ceremonies were held to inaugurate thirty-two officials. There were four people presented with the noble title of *Cheteria*, four higher non-noble officials were promoted to higher rank within the office of higher non-nobility (*Pehin Manteri*), twenty people were given the title of higher non-noble office (*Pehin Manteri*), and four received lower non-noble title (*Manteri Pedalaman*). Two of them were fathers of my friends. One of them was inaugurated with a title of *Pehin Manteri* (higher non-noble official), whereas the other had conferred upon him a lower non-noble title of *Manteri Pedalaman* (Officials of Inland). At the time of their fathers' inauguration ceremonies, I was in Perth. However, I was in Brunei Darussalam from January until mid-March 2004 and before I left for Perth, one of them told me of the news. My other friend only told me after his father's inauguration ceremony and emailed me the photographs he had taken (see plate 102). During the ceremonies, both of them wore traditional woven clothes. The inauguration ceremonies were telecast live on national television in Brunei Darussalam. They were also covered in the national news and could also be accessed through the internet which I followed. I asked my siblings in Brunei Darussalam to record the live telecast of the ceremonies and send the video tapes to me in Perth.





**Plate 102: Orang Kaya Maha Bijaya Haji Othman bin Uking and members of his family.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Norazam bin Orang Kaya Maha Bijaya Haji Othman.)

My ethnographic data on the investiture ceremony are not based only on the video recordings alone. I also conducted several interviews with informants, who had participated in the ceremony themselves. My informants were both from noble and non-noble officials. Two of them were responsible in the compilation and publication of the royal custom in Brunei Darussalam (see Pengiran Yusof 1958). In addition, I interviewed two senior officers from the Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara. This department is responsible for handling the protocols of royal court functions, including the investiture ceremony. Another informant is an Associate Professor at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, who is an expert on Brunei culture and gives lectures on the royal custom and sumptuary law of Brunei Darussalam at the university.

When a traditional title, such as Vizier, *Cheteria* (sub-vizier), *Pehin Manteri* (higher non-noble official), *Manteri Pedalaman* (lower non-noble official) was conferred, whether upon a noble or non-noble, this person had to undergo an investiture ceremony. The ceremony was conducted in the presence of the Sultan or his representative and other dignitaries. It might be held at the *Lapau* (Parliamentary House), the Palace, the residence of the host representing the Sultan (if the Sultan is not attending the ceremony) or other specified venues.

During the ceremony, the endowed official was usually dressed in the national costume of traditional woven cloths. There was no specification of colour and design. However, according to my informants, yellow was not allowed, as it was the colour reserved for the Sultan<sup>5</sup>. The only time in recent memory that yellow had been worn by a person other than the Sultan was during the proclamation of the Crown Prince in 1998 (see plate 103). This situation was exceptional and can be explained by the fact that as the Crown Prince is next in line for the throne of the Sultan.



**Plate 103: The Crown Prince wear yellow traditional woven clothes during his proclamation ceremony.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department).

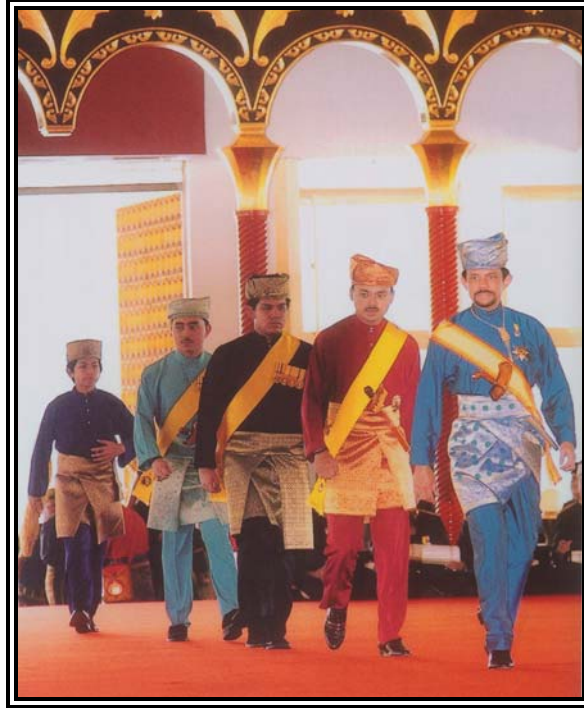
Before the investiture ceremony started, the *Istiadat Mengambil* (Summoning Ceremony) was held. A delegation of selected officials was assigned to summon the official who was to receive the new title from his residence and then they escorted him to the *Lapau*, where the ceremony took place. The number of officials in the delegation depends on the office and rank of the official to be inaugurated. This ceremony was carried out in front of the Vizier who gave his consent for the proceedings of the ceremony. He wore traditional Malay attire, *sinjang* and *dastar* of traditional woven cloths.

While waiting for the return of the delegation, the Vizier assigned the Chief *Cheteria* to appoint a *Mudim* (religious officer) to read the *Chiri* (the letter



of credential) for the official upon whom the title was to be bestowed. The *Chiri* was read at the investiture in the presence of the Sultan so as to legitimate the official's installation to his office. At investiture ceremonies for lower non-noble officials, the *Kurnia Tauliah* (letter of Commission) instead of the *Chiri* was read in the presence of the Vizier acting as the Sultan's representative. The *Mudim* was dressed in his official black *jubah*.

When the Sultan, the Crown Prince (the eldest son of the Sultan and next in line for the throne) and his other sons arrived at the *Lapau* and took their position in the hall, the ceremony resumed. The Sultan and his sons were dressed in traditional Malay costume with *sinjang* and *dastar* of traditional woven cloths of their choices of colour and a yellow sash (see plate 104). Then, the head of the non-noble ministers, *Pehin Orang Kaya Digadong*, conveyed the message that the ceremony was ready to proceed to the chief *Cheteria* who was responsible for the investiture ceremony i.e. the head of the royal customary office. Then, the chief *Cheteria* conveyed the message to the Sultan for his approval to commence the investiture ceremony.



**Plate 104: The Sultan, followed by his sons heading toward their seats.**

(Photo: Pejabat Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Dan Yang Dipertuan Negara Brunei Darussalam dan Pejabat Duli Yang Teramat Mulia Paduka Seri Pengiran Muda Mahkota 2004:66).

The official to be inaugurated was accompanied by a party consisting of two other officials and the men bearing the royal regalia. The number of escorts in the procession was determined by the office to be conferred upon the official. At this ceremony, the official inaugurated was positioned at the centre leading the procession. He then took his seat in the middle facing the Sultan, followed by the *Mudim* who would read the *Chiri* and then a party of *awang-awang* (appointed men) came in bearing trays covered with embroidered silk containing *chiri*, betel leaves and the robe of honour and *pakaian kerajaan* (ceremonial costume).

Once they were seated, the *awang-awang* bearing the tray containing the *chiri* and betel leaves stood up and gave the tray to the accompanying official who acted as the *kepala pengapit*, who sat at the right side of the official to be. Then, the official stood up and placed the tray for a moment upon the right shoulder, followed by the left shoulder, and later on top of the head of the inaugurated official. While the tray was placed on top of his head, the inaugurated official had

to hold the *gangsa sirih* (the tray containing the betel leaves) very briefly (see plate 105).



**Plate 105: The *Gangsa Sireh* is placed on top of the head of the invested official.**

(Photo: <http://www.brunet.bn/news/pelita/07april/pelita/htm>, access 13 April 2004).

This was followed by a recitation of the *Chiri* (see Pengiran Yusof 1958:71-73) to legitimate his installation. The *Chiri* is written in a combination of three languages: Arabic, Sanskrit and Malay. When the name of the official was announced during the reading of the *chiri*, he had to perform a gesture of respect, *laila sembah*, to the Sultan and again when the *Mudim* announced the loyalty of the official to the Sultan and his heir. The official performed the *laila sembah* by lifting both arms and bringing both palms together on his forehead towards the Sultan. The Sultan returned the gesture by lifting both arms and bringing both palms together, but at a lower level. The level of the gesture depends on the rank of the officials. At the same time, royal cannon salute was fired a certain number of times, which was an indication of the rank and office (see Pengiran Yusof 1958).

After the recitation, the *Chiri* was rolled up and placed in the tray to be presented to the inaugurated official, with the other regalia after the ceremony. A thanksgiving prayer recited by one of the religious ministers was followed by *menjunjung ziarah* (shaking hands) with the Sultan. Again, the officer performed the gesture of respect before and after he shook hands with the Sultan. Then, the inaugurated official returned to take his earlier position and paid respect to the Sultan once again. The inaugurated official and the procession marched out of the hall. Then, the chief of the non-noble officials, *Pehin Orang Kaya Digadong*, conveyed the message to the chief *Cheteria* in charge that the ceremony had been completed. The chief *Cheteria* then informed the Sultan of the completion of the ceremony and asked for the Sultan's approval to adjourn the function.

### **The Symbolism of the Ceremonial Dress.**

The Sultan sometimes wears traditional Malay costume or a military uniform. For example, during his fifty-sixth birthday celebration in 2002, the Sultan wore a military uniform at the march past ceremony held at the *Taman*, but at a later ceremony held at the Palace, he changed into traditional Malay costume. The freedom of the Sultan to wear clothes of his own choice indicates that he has supreme power. He stands not only at the top of, but outside the system and is not constrained by its rules. In Brunei Darussalam, the Sultan holds multiple roles. Not only is he the Head of State, but also the Prime Minister. He also holds the positions of Minister of Defence, Minister of Finance, the Head of Islamic Faith in Brunei Darussalam, and the Head of Customary Law. At the top of the hierarchy the Sultan could wear what he likes, including at royal court ceremonies, thus reflecting his position as the supreme authority in the country. Therefore, I interpret that the different types of clothing he chooses to wear at different functions also indicates his multiple positions, and his decision to wear traditional woven clothes seems to me not only to be in keeping with the tradition, but also reaffirms his position as the Head of Malay Sultanate and the Head of Malay Customary Law. In Brunei Darussalam, the Sultan not only has the

freedom to choose his dress, he also has the authority to order or approve what other people should wear, especially at royal court ceremonies.

The design of the traditional Malay costume was unique to the Sultan. There is no specific law forbidding imitation of the textile design used for the Sultan now, but the designers told me they refused to let anyone else use the motifs they had designed for the Sultan. For them, allowing other people to 'copy' designs designated for the Sultan would be tantamount to putting such a person at the same level as the Sultan; such an act is improper in Brunei culture. In the past, no subject was allowed to wear clothes similar to the ruler's unless the Sultan consented to this practice (Rusinah 1992). In Brunei Darussalam, such control over designs is possible, as there are not many designers of traditional woven cloth. In fact, currently there is only one designer who is actively producing new designs. There was another official designer, but he is now retired. Both designers were affiliated with the same institution, the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre, so problems associated with keeping specific designs exclusive to the use of the Sultan and other members of royal family do not arise. Most weavers in Brunei Darussalam were trained at the Centre, and they are aware of such controls. Besides, they merely reproduce or modify existing motifs and designs. I suggest that the refusal of the designer to let other people wear a similar motif to the Sultan is one way of asserting 'social distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) and affirming the Sultan's absolute power and highest status.

Textiles are used to indicate status throughout the region especially in hierarchical societies such as that of eastern Sumba as well as in those societies with Sultans, such as Brunei Darussalam. Historically, in Brunei Darussalam, transparent and thin fabrics (*kain jarang dan nipis*) and those of a yellowish colour (*warna kekuningan*) were forbidden to be worn without the consent of the Sultan. According to the traditional law, *Hukum Kanun Brunei* (Brunei Law), failure to comply with the rules would require the clothes to be torn off the body of the wearer, as well as the imposition of the death penalty (Rusinah 1992). In Eastern Sumba, Indonesia, Adams (1969) suggests that types of textiles indicate

social status and elaborated costumes are usually a privilege for those of high rank. For instance, large *hinggi* or shoulder cloths with rich *ikat* patterning in indigo and blue and a monogram or personal motto woven into a separate band at the bottom are made for princes and become heirlooms and symbols of wealth.

Later, there is no specification in Brunei Darussalam as to what type of cloths to wear in the royal court, although traditional woven textiles have been most commonly worn. For instance, in the genealogy of Brunei rulers recorded by Datu Imam Aminuddin stated during the coronation of the Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin in 1919, Pengiran Bendahara (at the time, Pengiran Bendahara was a position of a chief vizier) wore a white suit, including a white *Jong sarat* (traditional woven cloth), whereas Pengiran Shahbandar (one of the *Cheteria*) wore a black *Jong sarat* (Amin Sweeney 1998: 124). I was also told by my weaver informant that her mother was assigned to weave traditional cloths for the costume to be worn by the newly installed king, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin. However, during the reign of the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III (1955-1967), also known as ‘the Father of Modern Brunei’, traditional cloths were officially introduced and used as part of ceremonial court dress when the Malay traditional costume was worn. Although at the time of his reign, Brunei was still a protectorate state of the British government, the Sultan was in control of Malay custom, and the British government was not allowed to interfere with Malay customs. This lack of interference contrasted with the colonial situation in Java. According to Boow (1988:72), unlike in Java, the English and Dutch colonists interfered with local customs by simplifying and limiting the Javanese homage customs and court regalia, resulting in an abatement of certain rules of homage and etiquette. For example, if European clothes were worn to court, normal rules of respect and protocol no longer applied. In Brunei Darussalam, when Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien was in power, although Western military uniforms were used at court functions, Malay traditional attire was also concurrently worn. For instance, at the ceremony of sitting on the dais during the royal wedding between the Crown Prince Hassanal Bolkiah (now known as Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah) and Pengiran Anak Saleha (now known as Raja

Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha) in 1967, the groom wore a Western military uniform whereas his bride wore traditional woven clothes (see plate 106). Other officials were also dressed in traditional clothes.



**Plate 106: The ceremony of sitting on the dais at the Royal wedding between Crown Prince Hassanal Bolkiah (Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah) and Pengiran Anak Saleha (Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha) in 1967.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Department of Museums, Brunei Darussalam.)

Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien also established the use of certain colours, type, patterns, designs and motifs to distinguish social rank. Initially, certain colours were used for personal standards and ceremonial clothing for the royal regalia bearers (see Pengiran Yusof 1958), but later these colours were extended for traditional cloths used for ceremonial clothing in the royal court for other officials. In Brunei Darussalam, colours, such as yellow, white, green, black, red, purple, orange, blue and pink were adopted in royal court. Later, other colours, such as maroon, olive green and silvery blue were also adopted.

According to my informants, several of whom were the committee members involved in the establishment of the royal court ceremonial dress in Brunei Darussalam, there is no inherent symbolic significance to colours and

designs, but their differentiation in use distinguishes rank. They explained that the selection of each colour was based on logic, and the availability and popularity of particular colours at that time; and the designs were merely ornamental. One of them said that the logics behind why black was chosen for day events and white for evening functions were for safety and visibility reasons. Other colours, such as pink and purple were chosen because of their popularity at the time. However, by looking at the background of Brunei court which was once influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist practice, I suggest it is impossible not to rule out the possibility that the adoption of these colours may be linked to such influence. When the decision was first made, it was for a limited number of officials: higher non-nobles and lower non-nobles. Now, the ceremonial costume is extended to senior officials and other officers, including those in the modern administration and offices and is sanctioned by the government and distributed through the *Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara* and Prime Minister's office; such ceremonial costumes are worn when prescribed for royal court functions. The present Sultan continued the idea, adding more colours and designs to accommodate changes to the administration system since Independence. The traditional cloths used for ceremonial dress are specially designed by an official designer and commissioned to the weavers in the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre. The designer informed me that once given the assignment, she submitted the proposed designs and colours for the ceremonial cloth to the authority; once the design and colours are approved she usually distributes the weaving tasks to appointed weavers.

When attending royal court functions, officials and other guests were informed by an authorised officer to wear the ceremonial dress which was commanded by the Sultan. According to my informants only certain titleholder and officials are given the right to wear certain patterns, designs and colours of traditional clothes, which corresponds with what Darish (1989:120) interprets as 'a visible form of insignia of the office'. In Java, Boow (1988) also found that only certain people are allowed to wear certain designs of batik and that such design distinguish the status of the wearer. Moreover, there are rules and



regulations that must be observed, especially when batik is worn to attend the royal court ceremonies and disrespect for these laws is seen as an act of rebellion.

In Brunei Darussalam, my informants told me if the guest did not wear the costume as prescribed when attending royal court functions, if there was time, he would be asked to go home and change; otherwise, he was asked to leave.

According to them, the wearing of uniformed traditional ceremonial dress signifies that officials are required to act with discipline and obedience (Cohn 1989: 308). The obedience of the officials also manifests respect and ceremonial precedence. Being obedient and respectful to the Sultan is part of the characteristics that could be linked to two of the three pillars of Malayness i.e. *bahasa* (language), *raja* (ruler) and *ugama* (religion) (Shamsul 2001: 357).

Islamic teaching requires obedience not only to Allah and his messengers, but also to authority figures, such as rulers. This is confirmed in the Quran, Sura 4 – Women, verse 58 as translated,

O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the [messengers], and those among you invested with authority; and if in aught ye differ, bring it before God (Al-Quran) and the apostle [Sunnah], if ye believe in God and in the latter day. This is the best and fairest way of settlement (Rodwell, 2001: 55).

Because of the influence of Islamic teaching on most Bruneian officials their compliance in wearing uniformed ceremonial dress as prescribed by the Sultan or authority represents their obedience and respect to the ruler and symbolises their loyalty and submission to that authority.



**Plate 107: Some of the *Cheteria* attending the Royal Marching ceremony during the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's 56<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The establishment of a governance system based in a Cabinet and Ministers appeared to motivate the recreation of more new designs and motifs for the ceremonial dress of certain officials, particularly when attending royal court functions. Identical patterns, designs and motifs of ceremonial dress represent the same office; however, the use of different colours signifies different ranks within the particular office. In the Brunei court ceremonial dress, there are also similar colours used for different office. However, different patterns and motifs have been employed to distinguish the difference.

### **Robe of Honour.**

All dignitaries and officials are appointed and approved by the Sultan. In the traditional political system, being invested with a certain office or title not only brings honour, but it also entails duties and responsibilities in a hierarchical structure of political authority (Mohd Jamil 2003a). These officials are responsible as the 'eyes and ears' and the messengers of the ruler to the subjects and vice-versa (Pengiran Ahmad 1988). In addition, they are also responsible to assist with administration and develop the state. Thus, the bestowal of title not only is an apprehension of social status, but it also embeds an element of political power.

The title invested upon each official constitutes certain duties and responsibilities passed on to them. At the investiture ceremony, the newly appointed officials are given traditional woven textiles in a form of *sepengadak pakaian* (a complete set of cloth). The colour and design of such textiles is not specified, and they are not sewn (see plate 108). The officials are also given another set of traditional uniforms, consisting of two traditional suits, one in black and one in white, and a *sinjang*, an *arat* and *dastar* made from traditional woven cloths of the specific colour and design according to the rank and office of the official. These sets of ceremonial dress are known as *pakaian kerajaan*. Along with the clothes, such articles as a *keris* (Malay dagger) are included. These sets of ceremonial dress are required to be worn when attending royal court ceremonies, as specified by the relevant authority. Certain high noble officials, i.e. the viziers, are also given *pakaian persalinan* or change of clothes of any colour and design approved by the Sultan. The clothes are required to be worn by the newly appointed vizier immediately after the inauguration ceremony (Pengiran Yusof 1958).

In the old days, cloths were also given to appointed representatives of the Sultan. The *Silsilah Raja-Raja Brunei* recounts that when the Sultan sent his envoy abroad, every member of the delegation was given a complete set of clothing accordingly, and higher officials were also given royal regalia, including a kris, sword and royal umbrella (Sweeney 1998: 73). Perhaps, the presentation of cloth and royal regalia can be interpreted as a ‘metaphor of power and authority’ (Cohn 1989:313) that empowered recipients to act on behalf of the ruler. The acceptance of the honour by the officials signifies their obedience to the Sultan and their readiness to do whatever service that is required of them.



**Plate 108: Betel leaves, a credential letter and *pakaian persalinan* (Robe of Honour)**

(Photo: Courtesy of Norazam Bin Orang Kaya Bijaya Haji Othman.)

### **Conclusion.**

For centuries, traditional woven textiles have always been part of Brunei tradition and are commonly worn as ceremonial dress in the Brunei royal court. They are known to manifest social status. However, due to lack of detailed documentation, it is not known to what extent historically the traditional cloths were used to indicate ranks. In *Silsilah Raja-raja Brunei* are accounts of the sumptuary rules at royal court ceremonies and the specific colours of traditional woven textiles worn by certain dignitaries and officials at the coronation of the new Sultan, as well as the use of textiles as gifts given to the Sultan's representatives and appointed officials, but they are not comprehensive. Social and political organisation in Brunei Darussalam is highly stratified. The manifestation of the social stratification is realised in many ways. When Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien came to power, he introduced the use of specific colours and motifs of traditional woven cloths for ceremonial dress, which then was developed by the present Sultan. The use of traditional woven textiles in the Brunei royal court has been regulated as a means to reflect differences between people. The textiles are not only being utilised as ceremonial dress, but also is part of the royal regalia. The right of the sultans in Brunei Darussalam to create

and apply ceremonial dress codes and sumptuary laws signified the Sultan's power to influence the shaping of the royal custom. In addition, it appears to me that such manifestation of distinction indicates the desire of the monarch to ensure that the system of social stratification, especially at the ceremonial organisation, which is one of the cores of Brunei identity, continues.

In this chapter I have discussed the significance of designs and colours of traditional textiles in reflecting status and rank in the social and political hierarchy. The privilege to designate and distribute, as well as access to the traditional textiles in the royal court bespeak power and authority. The elaboration of the use of textiles in the Brunei royal court occurs not only within the traditional system, but has also been intensified by the development of the modern system of governing.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> In this context, additional means newer established office of a lower ranking within the level. For example, additional *cheteria* four is ranked below *cheteria* four.

<sup>2</sup> In standard Malay, *Dagang* have multiple meanings, including trade, trader, merchant, commerce and foreigner. In this context, *dagang* means foreigner.

<sup>3</sup> If the function is held at night, women are required to wear white *kain kapit*. The code of dress is prescribed and authorised through the Protocol Unit of Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara.

<sup>4</sup> The second wife was divorced by the Sultan in 2004 and she was stripped of her royal title.

<sup>5</sup> The Sultan does not necessarily wear yellow clothes at royal court. The Sultan could wear any colour he chooses for his clothing, but there were occasions the Sultan wore yellow, such as during his Silver Jubilee Anniversary to the throne and during one of the investiture ceremonies held in April 2004.

## Chapter Seven

### CREATING NEW TRADITIONS.

#### **Introduction.**

In her article *the Invention of Convention*, Larcom (1982) explores the utilisation of a simple art object, the wooden slit-gong, as part of a complex cluster of symbols known as *kastom*, i.e. custom and tradition, in Malekula Island of Vanuatu. According to an earlier researcher, Deacon (Larcom 1982), the wooden slit-gongs played an important part in the ceremonial and everyday life of the people. The gongs were beaten in special rhythms for rituals and to convey messages. Before independence, the people did not seem to be interested in the gongs or in the traditions of their parents. However, since Vanuatu's independence, *kastom* has become the base of national identity and unity, as well as a way of representing past authenticity in contrast to Western values. As part of that change, the wooden slit-gong has become an icon of the country and is used to adorn public buildings and decorate posters and postcards (Larcom 1982).

The deployment of custom and tradition, as well as objects to represent national identity and unity is not unique to Vanuatu. The same occurs in Brunei Darussalam. Since the declaration of '*Melayu Islam Beraja*' (Malay Islamic Monarchy) as the national ideology in 1984, custom and tradition have also become part of the basis of an emerging sense of national identity and solidarity. In the case of Brunei Darussalam, among other things, locally woven textiles have become one of the national icons that represents the custom and tradition. Although the majority of traditional cloths are produced by the Brunei ethnic group, they are widely used among other Malay ethnic groups.

Traditional woven cloths have always been used by the Malays for special occasions, but the introduction of new ceremonies, such as University Convocation and the Teachers' Day celebration has intensified the contemporary use of traditional textiles and their use as part of Malay traditional costume. Although these ceremonies are new events, they have been designed in keeping with Brunei's tradition. Such invention need not be accurate in relation to the real

past; however, it gains authority and delivers identity by referring to a significant past. One of the renowned characteristics of Brunei culture is the use of traditional costume when attending important ceremonies. Thus, I argue that the construction of these ceremonies may be seen as a way to ensure the survival of certain traditions, including the production and consumption of traditional woven cloths. In other words, the invention of tradition provides some continuity with the past which gives added legitimacy to what they represent in contemporary situations.

The invention of tradition is inherently relational and multiple, ranging across a variety of contexts and meanings (White 1993). In Brunei Darussalam, the government plays an active role in propagating ‘the invention of tradition’ as a vehicle to revive or stimulate national culture. The propagation of ‘invented traditions’ by the government shows the role of the state as a powerful institution in the constructions of culture (White 1993). These ‘invented traditions’ are not limited to the construction or reconstruction of certain ceremonies, but also to enforcing and reviving selected practices and objects that have continuity with Brunei identity and its legitimacy to what they represent as the national culture. In the case of traditional textiles, institutions were established to ensure that their production continued, and their use as costumes and gifts is being popularised to represent national culture and as an emblematic icon of Brunei identity. My informants explained to me that it is important to promote local traditional woven textiles as they are produced and consumed by the people, and signify Brunei cultural identity and heritage. It appears to me that the utilisation of traditional woven textiles among the people exhibits attachment to Brunei culture as a whole.

In this chapter, I explore reconstruction in the production and consumption of traditional textiles. First, I focus on the establishment of weaving workshops by the government, as well as the Foundation of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah to ensure the weaving tradition continues in Brunei Darussalam. I then discuss the government’s support of invented traditions as a way to foster greater uses of woven cloths. For example, in Brunei Darussalam, there have been many ceremonies celebrated in commemoration of certain events, such as



commemorations of the National Day, Teachers' Day and Convocation ceremony of the local university. These events may not have been directly focused on the utilisation of traditional woven cloths solely as they are generally used as a vehicle to reflect Brunei's identity. Furthermore, these events provide an avenue to define and propagate an ideology of nationalism (Babadzan 2000; Lindstrom and White 1993). I will use examples of these ceremonies to illustrate how traditional textiles are being used and draw out the analysis of their meanings.

### **Continuation of the Weaving Tradition.**

Cloth weaving is a skill passed on from mother to daughter among Brunei Malay women. Weaving activities have been conducted at home and considered as a part-time activity. At one stage, especially in the early 1970's, there was genuine concern for the future of traditional cloth weaving and fear that the craft would die out. Increasing educational opportunities for females, employment in government agencies, the lure of the private sector, all of which offered a regular income and other benefits, contributed to the stagnation in weaving activities.

#### The Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre.

In order to preserve and promote cloth weaving as part of the Malay cultural heritage, the Government of Brunei Darussalam established a handicrafts training centre in 1975. The centre is formally known as *Pusat Latihan Kesenian dan Pertukangan Tangan Brunei* (the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre). The Centre is fully funded by the government and is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. The Brunei Museums have been responsible for the Centre's organisation and administration. When it was first established, a temporary workshop was set up in Berakas, located in the Brunei Muara district. However, in 1982, a permanent building was erected at Kampong Subok, near the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. It was officially opened by the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien, in January 1984.

The Centre has three main objectives: first, to encourage interested people to be active in the production of handicrafts and to make use of the various facilities provided by the Training Centre; second, to educate the younger

generation in traditional Brunei arts and handicrafts, as well as providing courses to train them in skills; and third, to give exposure and promote the sale of Brunei arts and handicraft products nationally and internationally as part of Brunei's national cultural heritage.

In line with the objectives of its establishment, the Centre offers five courses, including traditional cloth weaving, the focus of this thesis. Under the formal weaving training, certain requirements have to be met by the applicants. According to the regulations, only female citizens aged between seventeen and thirty years old will be accepted. Prior to enrolment, the applicants have to sit a written test and be interviewed. When accepted, the trainee undergoes three years of training, while receiving a monthly allowance of B\$335.00 and a free uniform. The trainees are taught by expert weavers, many of whom are graduates from the Centre (see plate 109). In 2004, there were ten experienced weavers, including one chief instructor, all government employees, employed to teach 39 trainees.



**Plate 109: The Cloth weaving course at the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)

#### Weaving Workshops at the Foundation of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah.

Apart from the weaving training funded by the government, there are two weaving workshops set up under the administration of the Foundation of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah. The Foundation was established in 1994 in commemoration of the 29<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's silver jubilee

anniversary to the throne. It is privately funded by the Sultan and members of his family as a personal contribution from them to the welfare of the people.

The weaving project was launched with the main objective of helping women by providing them with cloth weaving skills. The first weaving workshop was established in August 1994. The workshop is located in a resettlement area in Kampong Ayer at Kampong Bolkiah A. In May 1995, another workshop was set up at a different location, also in Kampong Ayer at Kampong Bolkiah B. These villages are resettlement housing areas for fire victims from Kampong Ayer. The weaving training scheme in the Foundation is limited to the female residents of both villages. According to the instructor, only six trainees are enrolled in each batch of recruitment. Requirements to enrol are similar to that of the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre. There are five experienced weavers employed to instruct twelve trainees.

#### Inherited tradition to Formal Institutions.

The formation of institutionalised bodies for craft production, including cloth weaving, has accomplished a transformation: it is now possible for skills formerly learnt in the domestic sphere to be acquired formally. In earlier times, weaving skills were passed down by close relatives. The Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre and the Foundation of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah's weaving workshops now provide access for people who are interested in learning the skills, but have no one within their family circle to teach them. Furthermore, traditional woven textiles used to be one of the crafts exclusively produced by *puak* Brunei and was especially linked to women of high non-noble status. By offering the weaving course to interested females citizens within the prescribed age, the skill can now be learnt by interested females from other ethnic and social groups. Weaving skills are no longer exclusively in the hands of a specific social group. Further more, this also can be seen as a means to socialise this culture beyond the circle of the elite to make members of all ethnic groups feel they share in Brunei national culture. Thus, the establishment of the weaving institutions is seen as ensuring the continuity of Brunei heritage, as well as increasing its position as part of the national culture.

Use of traditional woven cloths is fostered in the royal courts and state ceremonies; therefore the establishment of formal weaving institutions perhaps is a focal point to produce designs and cloths for contemporary purposes, such as ceremonial costumes and uniforms, gifts and decorations. For this purpose, new designs are created and old designs are revitalised or reconstructed to fulfil such demands. The formation of the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre has been significant as an institution at which weavers and designers of traditional cloths are being trained (see plate 110), but also as a centre which encourages both innovation and continuity in designs of traditional textiles produce by them.



**Plate 110: A trainee was copying the motifs to be woven.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)

### **The Inventions of Traditions.**

The production of traditional textiles is not the only aspect of weaving that has undergone significant change. The consumption of such textiles is also in the process of transformation. Traditional woven textiles are one of the crafts signifying national culture, as they are the product of the Malays, but they are used by other people in Brunei Darussalam. Based on information from my

informants, as well as my observations, it appears to me that their creations and consumption constitute symbols of Malay culture, as well as of Brunei identity.

The use of traditional textiles is no longer restricted to ceremonial occasions or life crisis celebrations. They are now used much more broadly, for example at national and international events as appropriate clothing and as gifts. Traditional cloths have also been used and displayed as a representation symbolising national identity. Therefore, it appears to me that the utilisation of traditional textiles in these events is significant not only as an attempt to establish continuity with the past (Hobsbawn 1983), but also as a symbol of national identity.

In her study of batik in Malaysia, Arneys (1997) suggests that the consumption of local batik is one way of expressing national identity. The act of consuming local products is encouraged as a manifestation of patriotism, part of a concerted effort by the government to promote nationalism (Arney 1997:18). According to Howard (1998), Queen Sirikit of Thailand initiated a study of the history of Thai dress with the intent of creating a national dress that was more in keeping with Thai traditions. This resulted in the adoption of five national costumes for Thai women which were introduced to the public in January 1963. Such measures can be seen as incorporation of Thai identity into nation-building. In Brunei Darussalam, the production and consumption of traditional textiles are used to enunciate national identity as their use demonstrates affiliation to Brunei culture as a whole. The revitalisation of such textiles in new ceremonies can be seen as part of a larger project of fostering Malay tradition by the government, especially in the post-protectorate era. Thus, continuous consumption of traditional woven textiles, including in the context of 'invented traditions', is a significant means to ensure the continuity of the cultural heritage. In the following sections, I give accounts of the use of traditional woven textiles in events in which I participated and observed.

#### The Convocation of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

Universiti Brunei Darussalam, currently the highest academic institution in Brunei, was established in 1984. When it was established, there were only four

faculties, namely the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Faculty of Management and Public Policy. In addition, there is also a Student Affairs section which is equivalent to a faculty. Since then, new faculties have been formed. There were also mergers between other institutions and departments into certain faculties, which were given new names. To date, there are nine faculties, including Students Affairs. Currently there are more than three thousand students enrolled, including international students.

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam is headed by the Chancellor. However, the administration and academic affairs are directed by the Vice-Chancellor who has two assistants. The University Council is composed of members from various government departments and private firms. The Secretary-cum-Registrar is also appointed and responsible for the implementation of the administration. These officers, as well as deans of faculties are included as the principal officers at the university.

The university's convocation is held once in an academic calendar. However, there are two sessions, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. The morning session is for postgraduates and first degrees graduands, whereas the afternoon session is for the postgraduate diploma, advanced diploma and certificate graduands. The certificates for graduands in the morning session are presented by the Chancellor, while the Pro-Chancellor presents the certificates in the afternoon session.

The convocation ceremony is one of the most significant events of the university's calendar. The first batch of students graduated in 1989. When the university was first established, there were only certificates and first degree programmes offered. Now, more programmes are offered, including diplomas and masters. In 2001, the university first offered Ph.D. programmes in social science and education. I studied at the university for my first degree and graduated in 1995. Not long after I graduated, I joined the academic staff. Since then, I have been involved on working committees at the University's convocation ceremony until I left to pursue my PhD in 2001. When I came back for my fieldwork in 2002, I volunteered to work in the Marshalling committee for

the morning session, giving me the access to do participant observation. The Marshalling committee is responsible for facilitating the organising of the graduands and ensuring that they are in a proper position according to their programmes, classification and names in alphabetical order. I was in-charge of the MA programmes and a few of the BA programmes. In addition, I was also assigned to lead the graduands procession into the hall. In the afternoon, I joined the procession along with the other academics. I appointed a research assistant to help me to take photographs at both sessions.

Apart from the graduands, the convocation ceremony is also attended by the principal officers, academics and supporting staff at the University. In addition, dignitaries and officials from government and the private sector are also invited. The graduands are allowed to bring a limited number of guests to the ceremony. During the ceremony, the principal officers, academics and graduands are dressed in their academic gowns, whereas other guests are dressed formally either in *baju Kebangsaan* or formal Western style attire.

The Universiti Brunei Darussalam has specific academic attire for certain officials and the graduands. Generally, the academic gowns are in black, identical to most other universities around the world. Male officials and graduands wear dark headgear (*songkok*), whereas the female ones wear *gandi* (a specially designed cap-like headgear for women) worn over the headscarf. Traditional woven cloths which are exclusive to Universiti Brunei Darussalam decorate the trimmings of the academic robe and the border of the *songkok* and *gandi* giving them a ‘traditional’ appearance. The trimmings are attached at the lapels and sleeves end of the academic gown, whereas the borders are attached around the headgear. The colours and motifs of the trimmings and the borders of the headgear differ for the graduands and the officials. The difference indicates the status of the officials and the level of the graduands.

The academic gowns for first and second degree holders are black and trimmed with turquoise trimmings of traditionally woven textiles (see plate 111). However, the motifs used to decorate the trimmings of the gowns and borders of the headgear are different. The first degree gowns are decorated with three motifs

namely *tadas*, *bunga cendawan* (floral motif of mushroom) and *lapik sembilan* (nine tiers lining motifs). The academic gown of Masters graduands is similarly designed, but with *awan belari* (running cloud) and *baling* motifs, which distinguish the level of degrees. The academic gown for the Advanced Diploma of Primary Education has only recently been introduced. It is decorated with symmetrical stylised triangular and nine tier motifs in gold thread with light pink background (see plate 112).



**Plate 111: The Graduands at the Convocation Ceremony of Universiti Brunei Darussalam.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)





**Plate 112: Recipients of the Advance Diploma of Education.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)

The academic gowns of the officials are navy blue. The colours and motifs of the trimmings for the gown, and the borders of the headgear, differ, indicating their rank. Some officials, such as the Chancellor, the Pro-Chancellor and the Chairman of the University Council have double borders around their headgear.

The gown for the Chancellor is in navy blue, whereas the trimmings are in yellow based *Si Lubang bangsi* designed traditional woven cloth attached around the neck, lapels and sleeves end of the gown. The trimmings are designed with eight different motifs (see plate 113), namely the *pagar batu* (stone fence), *tepi dastar Pengiran Muda Marak Berapi* (the border of Pengiran Muda Marak Berapi's [Prince Flaming Blaze] headgear), *Sukmaindera* (floral motif – the soul of the divine), *punca pucuk mahligai* (the tip of a palace), *air mulih bunga tanjung* (floral motif i.e. sp. mimosops elengi), *awan mengandung hujan* (cloud filled with rain), *awan berlari* (running cloud) and *tadas* (continuous tiny rectangle motifs and commonly used as a separator). The designer told me that some of the motifs were symbolic. For instance, the *air mulih bunga tanjung* motif represents a symbol of eternal relationships and *Awan mengandung hujan* means God's benevolence to His creations (Universiti Brunei Darussalam 1993).



**Plate 113: Sample of the trimming of the Chancellor's academic gown.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

The trimmings for the Pro-Chancellor, the Chairman of University Council, and the Vice Chancellor all have a similar design (see plate 114). Six motifs are used, namely *pagar batu* (stone fence), *Sukmaindera* (floral motif), *airmulih bunga tanjung* (arabesque motif of mimosops elengi) and *si Ganggung*, *pucuk naga sari* (shining dragon) and *siku keluang* (the elbow of flying fox). The Pro-Chancellor's trimming is white (see plate 115); the Chairman of the University Council's is grey and the Vice Chancellor's is green.



**Plate 114: Sample of the trimming for the Pro-Chancellor's academic gown.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah.)

The Registrar and Secretary, Members of the University Council, the Chief Librarian, the Bursar, Deans of the faculties and the Esquire Bedell<sup>1</sup> (Mace bearer) also have similar designs, but different colours on their trimmings. The base colours of the trimmings are as follows; orange for the Registrar and Secretary, violet for the members of University Council, dark blue for the Chief Librarian, Bursar and Faculty Deans, and red for the Esquire Bedell (see plate 116). University officers are provided with their academic gowns, but academic staff wear the academic gowns of the university from which they graduated.



**Plate 115: The Pro Chancellor of Universiti Brunei Darussalam.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)



**Plate 116: Some of the University's principle officials.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)

The convocation ceremony of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam is an event at which modern and traditional elements are combined. The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam as the Chancellor of the University presents the certificates to the graduands who along with specific officials wear traditional woven cloths (see plate 117). In addition, some royal court protocols are also observed, such as the seating arrangement and gestures of respect. At the event, the official guests were seated according to their rank. When receiving their certificates, the graduands are required to bow as gesture of respect to the Chancellor or the Pro Chancellor. The male recipients are also required to shake hands with them when receiving their certificates. Although the convocation of the university is an academic event, royal court custom is observed. These combinations show that Brunei is open to new influences and changes, yet maintains traditional values as the basic principle in its development.



**Plate 117: The Chancellor (the Sultan) of Universiti Brunei Darussalam handing the certificate to a graduand.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)

*Majlis Khatam Al-Quran* (Marking the End of the Quran Reading Ceremony).

The Quran is the holy book of Islam and adherents of Islam believe that it together with the tradition (Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad are basic sources of knowledge and important references. The Quran is the most sacred and significant ‘book’ among Muslims and it is obligatory for them to study it. Even non-Muslims recognise that the Quran is one of the most influential books known to humankind and that its influence is continuing to increase with the spread of Islam (Jones 2001:ix).

As the highest educational institution in Brunei Darussalam, Universiti Brunei Darussalam not only strives to provide academic excellence, but also aims to produce highly moral persons. This is in accordance with the university’s motto ‘striving towards the excellence of humankind’ (*Ke arah Kesempurnaan Insan*, which can be translated literally as ‘Towards Human Perfection’). In order to live up to its motto, the university strives to provide its graduands with knowledge and the spiritual, moral and social skills necessary to develop themselves and the nation. This is in line with the Islamic notion of knowledge which compels its followers to learn and study all aspects of knowledge of self and nation building. Nation building in Islam is the ability to develop systematic and comprehensive aspects of life, including the social, cultural, political and

economics under the guidance of the Quran and Hadith. Therefore, the notion of knowledge is not limited to *fardhu ain* (obligatory knowledge attained on a personal level in order to worship Allah), but also *fardhu kifayah* (knowledge that must be attained to serve the nation and world's society as a whole). The obligation to pursue knowledge has been stated in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad, 'pursuing knowledge is obligatory for all Muslims' (Mahmud Saedon 2002: 107). Furthermore, Islam views highly those who commit themselves to such an obligation, as stated in the tradition of the Prophet, 'those who go out with the intention to pursue knowledge are in the guidance and protection of Allah' (Mahmud Saedon 2002:108).

To conform to the notion of knowledge in Islam, the University through the Institute of Islamic Studies Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien organises a Quran reading programme for undergraduates. All Muslims undergraduates are encouraged to join the programme during their final year of study. The programme is conducted weekly at the University's mosque. The undergraduates are divided into groups, and peer students are appointed to guide the others under the supervision of appointed lecturers from the Institute.

The main objective of this programme is to provide undergraduates with the skill to recite the Quran properly. According to Islamic teaching, learning to recite the Quran properly is obligatory. It is one of the basic skills that one should acquire in order to perform other obligations. For instance, the obligatory prayers five times daily require Muslims to recite several sura or verses from the Quran. In the course of reading the Quran, the undergraduates are encouraged to study and understand the teachings. Understanding the teachings guides them in performing their duties and their responsibilities in line with Islamic teaching.

The ceremony to mark the end of reading the Quran which I attended took place at the University's mosque two days prior to the 2002 Convocation ceremony. Officials of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam and Ministry of Education attended the ceremony. In addition, parents, spouses, other family members of the graduands, and the University students were invited. One of my sisters was graduating and she participated in the programme. As an academic

staff member, I was invited to the ceremony. However, for the purpose of my research, I applied for permission to observe. I also asked my research assistant to take photographs at the event. The Minister of Education, who is also the chair of the University's Council, was the guest of honour. He was dressed in traditional attire. He wore a *sinjang* of locally woven cloths.

Both male and female participants were dressed in the national costume (see plate 118). The males were attired in white *baju cara Melayu* with dark coloured *sinjang* of traditional woven cloths and headdress (either in black songkok or white skull cap). The females wore dark *baju kurung* or kebaya and white *tudung* (headscarf). In addition, the female participants also wore *kain kapit* of traditional woven cloths, around their mid-bodies (see plate 119). Neither the colour, designs nor motif of the fabric was specified. I saw that the female participants wore different colours of *kain kapit*. For instance, my sister wore maroon with printed floral designed silk *baju kurung*, white scarf and red *kain kapit* (traditional woven cloth) of *Jong sarat* design. The traditional woven cloth was a gift from her husband when they got married. The wearing of *kain kapit* for females is considered appropriate ceremonial dressing which is only worn on special occasions by certain women. For example, on ceremonial occasions, only celebrated females wear *kain kapit*. According to my informants, the *kain kapit* is appropriately worn by celebrated females at such ceremonies in order to keeping with Malay custom and tradition. In line with such tradition, the secretary of the organising committee told me, all female participants were required to wear *kain kapit* of traditional woven cloths at the event.





**Plate 118:** The graduands participating in the *Khatam Al-Quran* ceremony.

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)



**Plate 119:** Female participants wearing traditional textile for *kain kaput*.

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

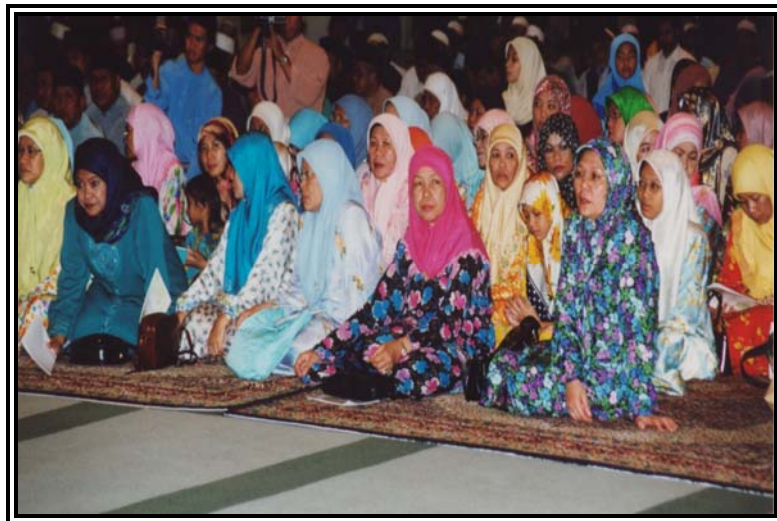
Most of the guests dressed in *baju Kebangsaan* in various colours (see plate 120), but there were also some of them wearing long Middle Eastern style garb locally known as *jubah*, especially among the male lecturers from the Middle East. The female guests were dressed either in *baju kurung* or *baju kebaya* and *tudung* (headdress) (see plate 121).





**Plate 120: The male guests dressed in *baju kebangsaan*.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah.)



**Plate 121: Female guests at the Khatam Al-Quran ceremony.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The climax of the ceremony was when a group of graduands recited several verses from the Quran. When they finished, there was religious chanting performed by a group of undergraduate students. At one point during the chanting, all the graduands and audience members stood up. The graduands went around shaking hands with the guests; females shook hands with the females, and

males with the males. The guests also strewed on the graduands pot-pourri made from fragrant screw-pines or pandanus and various coloured flower petals. After that, an *Imam* (religious official of the mosque) recited a thanksgiving prayer to mark the end of the ceremony.

#### The Teachers' Day Ceremony.

In 2002, Brunei celebrated the twelfth anniversary of Teachers' Day. Teachers' Day was established in 1990 and is now a national event celebrated on the 23 September and organised jointly by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs. The date commemorates the birth-date of the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei, the late Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien III. Teachers' Day was established to acknowledge the contribution of teachers in developing the nation.

In Brunei Darussalam, teaching is regarded as one of the most significant professions because with parents they are considered children's guardians. According to Islamic teaching and Malay custom, teachers play an important role in the life of the individual. The role of a teacher is to guide students in education and their moral and spiritual development.

During Teachers Day celebrations, awards such as *Guru Tua* (Old Teacher Award), *Guru Cemerlang* (An Excellent Teacher Award), *Guru Berbakti* (Most Meritorious Teacher Awards) and *Guru Terbaik* (The Best Teacher Awards) are given to selected teachers. Although this is a recently developed ceremony, it is blended with the tradition as the royal etiquette is strongly observed because the guest of honour is usually the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam<sup>2</sup>. Like other national events, the dress code for this event is specified by the organising committee. Committee members and audience members wear *baju Kebangsaan*, although there is no colour specification. Formal western styles of clothing are also allowed, especially among the non-Malay guests. At the 2002 celebration, I saw that the male recipients of awards wore *baju Kebangsaan* (see plate 123). Each of them wore different colours of costume and a matching *sinjang* of locally woven cloths with black *songkok* over their head. The female recipients wore black national costume i.e. *baju kurung* or *baju kebaya* with a black *kain kapit* of Jong

*sarat* (traditional woven cloth) over their mid bodies (see plate 124). Each of the female recipients also wore a black headscarf.



**Plate 123: The Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam placing a garland on the recipient.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department.)

The recipients were awarded with a certificate, some money, a medal and some public service benefits. The medal's garland ribbon specially designed for the Teachers' Day was of *Ayer muleh bunga melor* (jasmine flower with arabesque motif). In the sketch guide provided by the supervisor at the Brunei Arts and Handicraft Centre, the motif represents honour and pride (Mohd. Yassin 1991). At this event, traditional cloths are not only used as clothing, but specially designed fabrics are also be used for the garland ribbons used to hang the medals. It appears to me that the utilisation of the traditional textiles has been adopted to manifest the distinctive Brunei identity, as well as to promote sense of pride. Such presentation is not only to manifest the sense of honour and appreciation for the recipients, but also to keep up with tradition.



**Plate 124: Recipients of Teachers' Day Awards.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department.)

The *Bersama Rakyat* programmes.

*Bersama rakyat* (With the Subjects) is a programme organised to commemorate the Sultan's birthday. The programme is organised by the Prime Minister's Office so that the Sultan can get closer to the people and vice versa. The Sultan visits each of the districts of Brunei Darussalam on consecutive days.

Each year, the programme seems to have a similar format. A centrepiece of the programme is for the *rakyat* of each district to stage cultural performances which include traditional dance, ethnic ceremonies commemorating rites of passage, and exhibitions of local products. In the cultural performances, traditional cloths are frequently used. For instance, in 2002, during the Sultan's visit to the Tutong district, a traditional Tutong wedding was staged, and traditional cloths were worn by both bride and groom (see plate 125).



**Plate 125: Traditional Tutong wedding staged during the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam visit to Tutong district.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

The climax of the *Bersama rakyat* event in each district was when the Sultan and his siblings went around to greet his subjects. His subjects congratulated the Sultan and wished him and his family well. His subjects also gave him *pesambah* (gifts) that reflected the production of the local people, including traditional woven cloths. Also, during the programme of *Bersama rakyat* in the Brunei Muara district in the year 2002 in commemoration of the Sultan's 56<sup>th</sup> birthday, one of the *mukim* (a cluster of several villages), Mukim Lumapas, presented a length of traditional cloth properly rolled and placed in a transparent container. The cloth was blue in colour and decorated with scattered pattern arrangement with *bunga putar* (rotating floral motifs) (see plate 126). When I interviewed and asked the *Penghulu* of the *Mukim* for the reasons to give the Sultan a piece of traditional cloth as a gift, he told me that it was one way of showing their loyalty to the ruler. Other reasons are that traditional woven cloths are one of the products of the villagers, as well as being part of the traditional handicraft that signified the Brunei identity. The cloth was the product of a weaver living in *Mukim* Lumapas who had established her own weaving business. He also told me the people of his village felt that it is very important for them to promote the local products as it portrays the success of the villagers. However, he did not mention why a specific motif, i.e. *bunga putar*, was chosen. I am aware



that this motif used to be one of the favourite motifs of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien; and I was informed that the motif was once restricted for him and other people he gave approval to use it. Later, the motif have become democratised and then adopted to signify Brunei identity. This motif is now commonly used to decorate not only traditional cloths for private and formal use, but it has been duplicated to decorate objects for other uses, such as the napkin used for in-flight business class of the national airline, the Royal Brunei. The motif is also used in architecture, for instance, the motif is carved to decorate the front door of the Brunei Arts and Handicraft Training Centre (see plate 127). I suggest that the motif was chosen to decorate the gift for the Sultan because of its importance as a motif once exclusive to the late Sultan, as well as to show its link to Brunei identity.



**Plate 126: The Sultan receiving a traditional woven cloth from his subject.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah.)



**Plate 127: *Bunga Putar* is one of the motifs used to decorate the front door of the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah.)

During the events, apart from members of the royal family, other dignitaries also attended. Therefore, certain royal protocol was observed, such as the seating arrangement. The dress code was prescribed for these events. The guests were required to wear national costume or formal western style clothing. The *sinjang* of traditional cloth is an article of clothing that makes up the national costume. The participants and public were dressed in various fashions, from casual and western style of clothing to traditional ones.

#### The National Day Anniversary.

An anniversary of the National Day is a significant event celebrated to commemorate the resumption of Brunei Darussalam's Independence in 1984. Brunei Darussalam celebrates its national day anniversary on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February. The celebration is organised by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport with the co-operation from other government ministries and organisations in the private sector. At the celebrations, traditional woven textiles are used by both participants and guests. As in other national ceremonies, the national costume is prescribed for invited guests, although they are free to choose any colour they prefer. A formal western style of clothing is also permitted, especially for the non-Malay and expatriate guests.

I did participant observation at the National Day anniversary in three consecutive years from 2002 until 2004, when I returned to Brunei Darussalam for my fieldwork. At these events, traditional cloth was worn and displayed. In 2002, I observed that there were traditional dances performed by the students and traditional woven cloths were worn as part of their clothing. Traditional clothes were also worn by males participating in the march past. In 2003, recitations of *sajak* (poetry) and *syair* (epic) were part of the performance. The *sajak* were recited by two men, whereas the *syair* was read by a woman. The *sajak* and *syair* were alternately recited as voice over for the performance in the field. The reciters were dressed in traditional costume (see plate 128). The men wore a white national suit, black *sinjang* and *dastar* (specially folded headdress) made of *kain Jong sarat* (fully designed brocaded traditional woven cloth). The woman was dressed in floral designed *baju kurung* and *kain kapit* of *Jong sarat* in brownish crimson.



**Plate 128: The reciters of the *syair* and *sajak* during National Day Anniversary in 2003.**

(Photo: Mohd Yusri Haji Wahsalfelah.)

In 2004, one of traditional textiles designs i.e. *Sukmaindera* (the soul of divine), was formed by the participants in one of the field performances (see plate 129). One thousand and two hundred participants, dressed in blue and red clothes formed the image of the design which was interpreted by the choreographer to



symbolise ‘the creativity of the Brunei nation<sup>3</sup>’ (Konsep dan Format Persembahan Padang di Upacara Perhimpunan Agung Sambutan Ulang Tahun Hari Kebangsaan ke-20 2004:21). Other participants in the march past wore traditional cloths as part of their uniform. For instance, the Womens Association (one of the Non-Government bodies) team members wore traditional woven cloth of various designs and colours over their mid-bodies (see plate 130). The financial institution, *Tabung Amanah Islam Brunei* (Islamic Trust Fund of Brunei), also used traditional woven cloth of *kain beragi* design for the uniform of the males participating in the marching.



**Plate 129: *Sukmaindera* design created for field performance during National Day Anniversary in 2004.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department.)



**Plate 130: The Womens Association participating during the 20th National Day Anniversary in 2004.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Information Department).

### **The Representation of National Identity Based Upon Malay Culture.**

In the previous sections I have described how traditional textiles have been utilised in ceremonies at the national level. At certain ceremonies, specific motifs and designs are specially created or reconstructed and used to decorate traditional woven textile for clothing for certain people and for gifts at the events. These occasions, which are promoted by the government, use traditional cloths conspicuously whether as part of clothing or as gifts symbolising significant continuities with Brunei tradition and national identity.

For instance, at the convocation of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, traditional cloths are exclusively designed for the trimmings of the academic gowns for the some of the officers and the graduands. The differences in colours and designs of the academic robes' trimmings and the borders of the headgear denote the status of the wearer. According to the Assistant Registrar in the Chancellor's Office of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, the selection of certain colours in symbolising the particular rank of the university's officials is parallel to the colours specified for the official uniform of the traditional dignitaries in Brunei royal custom<sup>4</sup>. Similar colours used in the royal court are adopted for

traditional woven cloths and used as trimmings for the academic gowns (see table 2). For instance, yellow is the colour unique for the Sultan, the highest in the political and social hierarchy, so that particular colour is also adopted for the Chancellor of the University whose position is also at the top of the organisation. However, not all colours used in the royal court are adopted, as some modification may have been made for better presentation and appearance. Nonetheless, the modification still emphasises the rank or status of the wearer. Furthermore, contrasts in hue express relative rank in which darker hues of a colour express higher rank. The higher/lower contrast between dark blue and turquoise, and red and pink show that there is a consistent use of hue to express relative rank, with lighter hues of a colour ranking lower than darker hues. For instance, dark blue is used for the trimming of the deans' of faculties' academic gown, whereas a lighter hue i.e. turquoise is used for B.A and M.A graduands. The Dean's position is obviously higher ranking in comparison to graduands. Similarly, at the royal court lighter hues are also adopted to express lower rank. For example, dark purple is used for the Chief *Cheteria* ceremonial dress, whereas light purple is used for *Cheteria's* Four. In social hierarchy, the Chief *Cheteria* holds higher ranking above *Cheteria* Four.

The difference between levels of graduates can be identified both by colours and designs of the trimmings. Turquoise is used for both MA and BA graduands trimming; however, the level can be implicitly differentiated through the motifs used. More motifs are used to design the trimmings. The diploma trimming not only has different colour, but also different design. Being lower level, pink is adopted for diploma which is parallel to the colour used for the *Cheteria* thirty-two ceremonial dress at royal court, which is also the lower level within the *Cheteria* office. The use of different colours is not only restricted to the trimmings of the gown, but also for hoods in the case of the graduands. Like other universities around the world, the colour is used to denote the different programmes and faculties of study.

Dignitary in Royal Court	Colour of the ceremonial dress/personal standard.	Officials/ Graduands in UBD	Colour of the Academic gown's trimming
Sultan	Yellow	Chancellor	Yellow
Pengiran Perdana Wazir	White	Pro-Chancellor	White
Pengiran Bendahara	White	Chairman of University's Council	Grey
Pengiran Di Gadong	Green	Vice Chancellor	Green
		Assistant Vice Chancellor	Green
Chief <i>Cheteria</i>	Dark purple	Members of University's council	Dark purple
<i>Cheteria</i> 8	Orange	Registrar and Secretary	Orange
		Esquire Bedell	Red
<i>Cheteria</i> 16	Blue	Deans of Faculty	Dark Blue
		BA and MA graduands	Turquoise
<i>Cheteria</i> 32	Pink	Diploma	Pink

**Table 2: Parallel colour symbolism in UBD and Royal Court.**

In Thailand, local educational centres play an important role in inspiring the assimilation of local culture into national culture, including the promotion of the production and consumption of traditional textiles. For instance, in 1987 an exhibition of Lan Na textiles was held and a book was published entitled *Lan Na Textiles: Yuan, Lue, Lao*, by the Centre for the Promotion of Art and Culture at Chiang Mai University, with support from the Chiang Mai office of the United States Information Service. These had a profound influence on the wearing and collecting of traditional textiles (Prangwattanakun and Naenna 1998:60). In Brunei Darussalam, the use of traditional woven textiles in the modern and educational setting, especially in the highest educational institution, is also significant as a means to promote the continuity of Brunei cultural and national identity. The usage of the traditional textiles as trimmings of academic gowns and the adoption of the colours used in the traditional political system for its convocation ceremony indicate a conspicuous effort to ensure the continuity with the national culture. The role of the university as the highest educational

institution and the centre of knowledge is very important in preserving the cultural heritage of the nation. National institutions, particularly the educational system, have provided a powerful avenue for the inculcation of national culture.

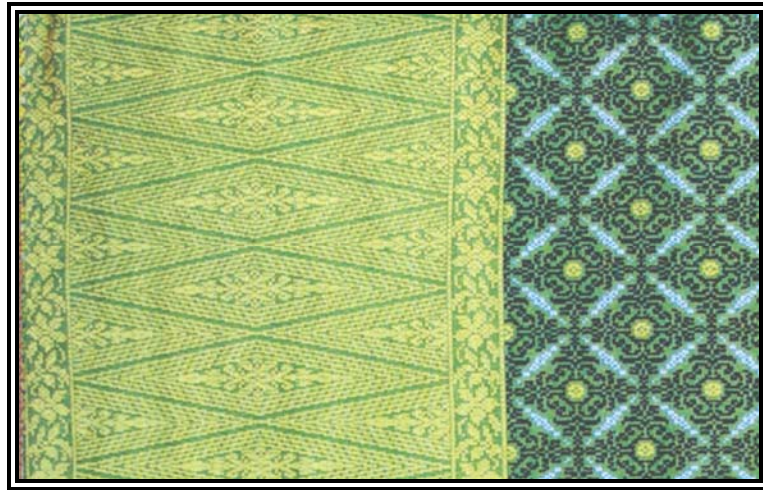
The use of traditional textiles to foster national cultural awareness as well as to signify rank distinction and office differentiation has been extended to other government departments and private companies. They are especially created for individual institutions and worn by officers affiliated to such institutions. Furthermore, certain colours and designs may denote the rank of the officials at the institution. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs employs traditional textiles as part of the uniform for the higher officials and appointed ambassadors or high commissioners (see plate 131). The fabric is exclusively designed for them by the designer at the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre. The male officials are provided with black *sinjang* and *arat*, whereas the females are given black *kain kapit*. The fabric is designed with *bunga arab gegati dalam belitang* (rhombus in square motif). Such cloths are not worn on a daily basis, however. The officers are required to wear them on specific occasions, such as at the presentation of letters of credence ceremony for the appointment of diplomats or high commissioners, and on other state occasions, such as the National Day and Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday.



**Plate 131: The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam with two Newly Appointed Diplomats of Brunei Darussalam.**

(Photo: <http://www.infofoto.org.bn>, accessed 18 February 2005).

There are two examples of private institutions adopting traditional textiles as part of their official attire. They are the Islamic Bank of Brunei (IBB) and the Islamic Trust fund of Brunei (*Tabung Amanah Islam Brunei* - TAIB). Both institutions are financial institutions operating in Brunei that were established in 1993. Each institution has specific designs. At IBB, the designs and motifs denote the rank of the officials. There are two designs used for the official attire: *kain Si Lubang bangsi liputan madu berpakan* design is for the board of directors (see plate 132), whereas *kain beragi bunga telapok warna berputar* (chequered design with rotating floral motifs) is for the officers (see plate 133). The base colour for the uniforms is green, which may be associated with Islam, as well as richness (*kesuburan*). At TAIB, a chequered design decorated with scattered floral motifs is adopted as their uniform. Combinations of ivory and green colours with gold threads for the motifs were used for the fabric.



**Plate 132: The *sinjang* for the Board of Directors of Islamic Bank of Brunei.**

(Photo: Islamic Bank of Brunei's desktop calendar 2004.)





**Plate 133: The *sinjang* for male staff of Islamic Bank of Brunei.**

(Photo: Islamic Bank of Brunei's desktop calendar 2004.)

Traditional attire has always been worn as ceremonial attire when attending cultural functions organised by individuals. Now, such clothing has become official attire when attending public and formal functions organised at state level, other than those of royal court functions where specific ceremonial costume is prescribed. At these occasions, male guests are required to dress in *baju Kebangsaan*, which includes *baju cara Melayu*, *sinjang* and *songkok*. Although *baju Kebangsaan* is prescribed as the official attire at these functions, guests are free to wear any colour they prefer. They are also allowed to wear *sinjang* and they may choose either locally or imported woven cloth. The direction to wear *baju Kebangsaan* at such an event indicates the importance of expressing attachment to Malay culture and of symbolising national identity.

At these functions, senior and higher ranking officials, and dignitaries, as well as other officials are usually invited. Many of them prefer to wear locally woven materials for their *sinjang*. The patterns, designs and colours of the *sinjang* vary in accordance with individual preference. The colour of the *sinjang* usually matches the colour of the *baju cara Melayu*. The preference to wear traditional textiles during such occasions may play a role in manifestation of social rank. The choice people make in wearing traditional cloths shows how an individual's choice is shaped by their particular social position. The preference is

not only influenced by the aesthetic presentation of the fabric, but also manipulated by the wearer to express his status socially and economically. Among Bruneians, the employment of the locally woven traditional cloths as part of the costumes not only manifests fine taste, but also higher economic status, as part of the meaning of the fabric stems from its high price. One of my high, non-noble informants, who is also a senior official at one of the government departments, admitted that when attending state occasions other than the royal court functions where he had to wear the ceremonial costume, he usually wore locally woven cloth for his *sinjang*, as part of the national costume. He mentioned:

For me, I must wear it when attending royal court functions, at other invitations; I dress accordingly... and I wear [locally woven cloths] for my *sinjang*, so that people will know who I am....<sup>5</sup> (my translation).

At several state events where I had the chance to observe, I saw some of my informants participating. On those occasions, I always saw them wearing locally woven traditional cloths. A lecturer at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam told me that he considers traditional woven cloths as a prestigious fabric. He admitted he owns a few pieces of locally woven cloths for his *sinjang* which he usually wears when attending formal and celebratory public functions. He also told me of his preference for more intricate designs of traditional woven cloths, those that carry a higher price.

From these comments, I suggest that the reason these men prefer to wear locally woven traditional cloths is to demonstrate to other people their taste and identity. Among some Bruneians, the consumption of locally woven traditional cloths as part of the costumes is used not only to manifest fine taste, but also high economic status, as part of the meaning of the fabric stems from its high price. Bourdieu (1984: 6) states,

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinction they make,...in which position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.



Thus, the possession of such cloth reveals the aesthetic taste of the wearer, as well as connoting economic wealth, and higher social status, too. In making the cultural choice, it is not necessary to obey a purely aesthetic logic; rather aesthetic judgement can change distinction of class into distinction of taste and vice versa, and in doing so strengthen the boundaries between classes (Bennet, Emmison and Frow 1999: 10).

At the *khatam Al-Quran* ceremony, traditional cloths are used as part of the clothing worn by both male and female participants. Furthermore, such cloths are also worn by male guests. Similarly, the cloths are also utilised during the Teachers' Day ceremony by the male and female recipients of Teachers' Day awards, besides being worn by male guests. Such usage was purposely arranged by the committees of the celebrations, as the participants and award recipients were asked to dress in a manner that indicates the role played by the government i.e. through the committee members, to promote the relationship between traditional textiles and Brunei identity.

The events, such as *khatam Al-Quran* and Teachers' Day are ceremonies held to mark the achievements of people in fulfilling their duties as Muslims, as well as members of the society. Their commitment to pursue knowledge, as well as to educate the public, is viewed very highly not only by society, but most significantly in the eye of Islam. In Islam, teachers must be honoured and respected regardless of their religion and social background. In addition, Bruneians also have high opinions of knowledgeable persons. Therefore, it would be appropriate for these achievements to be acknowledged and marked. In accordance with Brunei tradition, such achievements deserve to be celebrated publicly. Hence, the prescription of traditional cloth as part of the attire for honoured persons represents appreciation and admiration of their achievement and commitment. The distinctive way of wearing traditional cloths for the women honoured is to distinguish them from others. Furthermore, such a way of dressing is considered *majalis* (appropriate) as it shows the revival of old practices expressing Malay culture. According to my informants, it is imperative to maintain the *kemajalisan* (appropriateness) of dressing as it portrays decency as

a part of Brunei identity. Traditional cloth was exclusively designed by the official designer at the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre and used for the garland of the medal awarded to the selected teachers at the Teachers' Day ceremony. The adaptation and use of traditional textiles during these ceremonies, i.e. the *Majlis Khatam Al-Quran* and Teachers' Day can be seen as a way for the government to objectify such appreciation and appropriation.

During the Sultan's birthday, traditional cloths have been used as *pesambah* or gifts presented to the Sultan from his subjects. Such objectification can be interpreted as one way of expressing loyalty to the Monarch. For Bruneians, the monarch is the head and leader in whom the people put their faith, expecting him to lead justifiably and fairly according to Islamic teaching, and they fully depend on him to look after their welfare (Hashim 1999). And such faith must be fulfilled by the ruler, as it is not only his responsibility to the people, but most significantly such duties and responsibilities are entrusted to him by Allah. Therefore, the people sustain their obedience and loyalty to the ruler, as obeying and being loyal to the ruler is part of obeying Allah's commands. I consider the *Bersama Rakyat* programme as an 'invented tradition' that channels the hierarchical reciprocal relationship between the ruler and his subjects; using such objects as traditional textiles as gifts to strengthen this relationship.

At a national level, such as the National Day Anniversary celebration, traditional cloths have been displayed to show one of the common features of the Malay ethnic group, i.e. the dominant culture, thus using such cloths to give legitimation to the national culture. At an international level, traditional woven cloths are highlighted as a national icon. The government uses them to provide a tangible representation of a uniquely 'Brunei identity' as opposed to external influences. Hence their use by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is significantly noteworthy, as its officials must constantly manifest Brunei's unique identity in the international politics of difference.

## **Conclusion.**

The efforts of the government in inventing traditions, such as the establishment of the weaving training institutions and ceremonial occasions, including the Convocation ceremony, Teachers' Day celebration and the National Day anniversary, may be seen in part as vehicles to ensure the continuity of weaving tradition in Brunei Darussalam. In addition, their implementation has been shaped to enhance national culture in Brunei society. This national culture is largely composed of elements of the dominant Malay culture, following from one of the tenets in the national philosophy, 'Malay Islamic Monarchy'. This ideology has been constructed by officials to represent themes and ideas that are distinctively Bruneian.

The establishment of weaving institutions, such as the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre, is an important measure taken by the government to guarantee the production of traditional woven textiles continues. Skilled weavers and designers are employed to teach potential weavers and designers. The Centre not only uses old designs, but also creates new designs which are often used to accommodate contemporary purposes, such as uniforms, gifts and decorations. Therefore, the formation of the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre plays significant a role not only in training weavers and designers of traditional cloths, but also its realization of both innovation and continuity in the designs it produces.

Traditional textiles are one of the local productions that lie in the realm of cultural significance (Arney 1987). Therefore, the consumption, display and exchange of the locally woven textiles have been popularised in the state's events to represent or encapsulate national identity. The government, through its ministries, is promoting the production and consumption of the traditional woven textiles domestically and internationally as an iconic representation of Bruneian identity. Brunei's identity especially after the proclamation of its independence has been directly linked to the national philosophy of 'Malay Islamic Monarchy'.

The adaptation of the traditional woven textiles and the motifs and designs that are commonly used to decorate the traditional woven textiles in many of the

national and international events hosted by Brunei Darussalam may be seen as one way of expressing 'nationality', as such symbols are associated with the national space and culture. They are used to emphasise continuity between the people and the cultural background that bonds them together. Hence, I suggest that the utilisation of traditional cloth as part of clothing, as well as the duplication of designs and motifs of traditional textiles for other purposes, has been 'adopted by the authorities to define and propagate the sense of national identity' (Lindstrom and White 1993).

The invention of tradition has been continuously used as a vehicle to reconstruct culture and assert national identity. This chapter has discussed how the invention of traditions related to ceremonial occasions is used in the discourse of nationalism and identity. Traditions have been actively constructed and reconstructed, especially after Brunei proclaimed its independence in 1984, and declared its national philosophy of Islamic Malay Monarchy. Since then, that philosophy has become the foundation for the development, implementation and future planning of the nation. In this case, the philosophy has also been the core of the construction and reconstruction of culture.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This official is responsible for carrying the Quran immediately ahead of the Chancellor at the formal procession at the University's convocation ceremony. At Universiti Brunei Darussalam, the Quran is used instead of the Mace as a symbol of the authority of the Chancellor of the University.

<sup>2</sup> In 2002 celebration, the guest of honour was His Highness the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, as the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam was away on official visit.

<sup>3</sup> *Kreativiti bangsa Brunei.*

<sup>4</sup> Refer chapter six.

<sup>5</sup> *Aku, kalau adat istiadat yang patut memang ku pakai. Kalau jemputan lain atu; sesuaikanlah...dan ku pakai [kain tenunan] untuk sinjangku, sagai kana liat bah....*

## Chapter Eight

### **Exhibition and Commercialisation: Redefinition of National Identity.**

#### **Introduction.**

In the earlier chapters, I discussed the use and significance of traditional textiles in life cycle rituals, in the royal court, and in the reconstruction of culture to define and classify people. Traditional textiles are used as a visible expression of rank in the political hierarchy. They have also been manipulated in the reconstruction of national identity. Hence, traditional textiles have been given a function as a 'badge' or 'tangible expression' (Layton 1981: 49) for representing collective identity.

In post-protectorate Brunei Darussalam, national culture has been a fundamental part of the construction of the nation-state. According to Jory (1999), in order to construct a cohesive nation-state, culture has to play an important role in giving meaning to the new idea of the nation. Therefore, the construction of a national culture involves revitalisation and unification of traditional culture, as well as the accommodation of modern values (Metussin 1996). In this chapter, I continue to discuss how traditional textiles have been persistently used to redefine national identity as they are accepted as part of Brunei culture, and thus have been used to shape and regulate the formation of identity in Brunei Darussalam.

In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1991) highlights the importance of institutions of power that could control emerging national movements. He argues that policies of national ideology are inculcated through the mass media, the educational system, and administrative regulation and so forth (Anderson 1991: 163). In Brunei Darussalam, I can see this framework is also applied in a similar way. The government of Brunei Darussalam, through its ministries, departments and various other agencies, has been playing an important role in establishing what constitutes Bruneian national culture. These ideas have been disseminated widely through state-controlled channels, such as the bureaucracy, the education system and the media. In addition, the role played by

the private sector should not to be downplayed. They have also actively participated in advocating the redefinition of national culture.

Anderson (1991: 178) suggests that ‘...museums, and the museumising imagination are both profoundly political’. In Brunei Darussalam, it appears to me that ‘[a] general logoization’ (Anderson 1991: 182) of traditional cloths in which they are displayed and reproduced in many ways occurs. In this chapter, I attempt to explore the role of exhibition and display of traditional woven textiles in Brunei Darussalam as media to represent national identity. I also attempt to explicate the strategic uses of traditional textiles by institutions connected with the distribution and utilisation of cultural resources to shape populations in various ways (Gibson 2001). I will focus on the role of formal institutions, such as the Museums Department, given their function in providing the grounds and contexts in which people define, debate and contest their identities, beliefs and values, and eventually their social order (Karp 1991:15).

Weiner emphasises how individuals or groups create value in objects, by using them as commodities or treasure to fortify or reconstruct their cultural identities as she pointed out:

individuals ... keep certain objects as treasures, or in other cases sell them with impunity as commodities, or even approach the marketplace in an effort to translate their value into new forms. Some objects become so symbolically “dense” with cultural meaning that people covet them as prized collectible, “art”, or ancestral relics. Such density accrues through an object’s association with its owner’s fame, ancestral histories, secrecy, sacredness, and aesthetic and economic values (Myers 2001a: 9).

In Brunei Darussalam, the continuing use and production of traditional textiles rest partly on their importance as an income generator. Cloths contribution to economic development for the weavers has also become a part of the national agenda in promoting the commercialisation of traditional textiles in Brunei Darussalam. The commercialisation of traditional textiles is not only part of the economic process that will enhance weavers profitability, but also as an activity of cultural preservation and encouragement for the new generation to appreciate the national cultural heritage (Fatimah 2004: xiii).

In his treatment of Indonesian nationalism, Acciaioli (2001) suggests that archipelagic, maritime and aquatic idioms have been stressed as the shared substrate of *Nusantara* (archipelago) culture. The notion of a shared archipelagic culture was formulated by emphasising basic cultural unity, as disseminated through government pronouncements, publications and development programs during the New Order. Acciaioli puts forward the Bajau exhibition, erected at the National Museum in Jakarta in 1993 in observance of the international ‘Year of Indigenous Peoples’, to exemplify how the distinctive marine adaptation has been used to proclaim the unity of Indonesian culture. The Indonesian state provides an essential notion of shared culture as the basic vehicle to enhance cultural identity and national unity according to the constitution and the state ideology. Acciaioli’s paper focuses on the indigenous groups that were considered as *suku terasing* or *masyarakat terasing* (most isolated groups or societies) in Indonesia. In this chapter, I am focusing on a Malay group that has dominant influence. As Brunei Malays are the dominant group, as well as providing the culture of the ruling monarch, Brunei Malay culture has been adopted as the national culture. Here, there is a difference between Acciaioli’s perspective on Indonesia and the discussion of this chapter. Nonetheless, there is a common focus indicating the role played by the governing institutions in the construction and shaping of certain notions in accordance with the state’s ideology in order to establish national unity.

In debating government involvement in the shaping of the sphere of culture, Herbert (1885, in Bennet, Emmison and Frow 1999: 227) urged that government should only play an absolutely minimal role. However, opposing this opinion, Huxley (1890, in Bennet, Emmison and Frow: 1999:227) insisted that there is a need for government to concern itself with the cultural sphere. This philosophy is very much practised in Brunei Darussalam. The government, through its ministries and departments, is playing an important role in shaping the cultural sphere and ensuring that ‘Brunei identity’ is appreciated in the planning and implementation of all aspects of development and maintenance of the state. The government has involved itself not only in providing funding, but also setting general guidelines in accordance with the national philosophy to be followed so as



to legitimate this philosophy as the basis of national identity. Therefore, the basis of 'Brunei identity' is the national philosophy, '*Melayu Islam Beraja*' (Malay Islamic Monarchy); and all planning and implementations must reflect the state's aspirations and philosophy.

MIB [*Melayu Islam Beraja*] as the national philosophy of Brunei Darussalam is an ideal formulation on the way of life of the nation and state which become the base and source of reference in achieving national objectives that maintain identity, noble values for national resilience and Malay government guided by Islam as the state religion in the monarchical system of government. (Pehin Abdul Aziz Umar 1993:5, quoted in Abd Latif 2003a: 196)

In this chapter, I focus my discussion on the role of government and private institutions advocating traditional textiles as part of the representation of 'Brunei identity'. My treatment is not concentrated solely on the exhibition of the physical structure of the textiles, but also on 'logoization' of traditional textiles, such as the use or reproduction of motifs, patterns and terminology to promote cultural awareness. I will also discuss the role of government in supporting the commercialisation of traditional textiles.

### **The Politic of Museums.**

One of the government institutions that is actively promoting the representation of cultural identity is the Museums Department. Apart from its function in collecting, documenting, preserving and interpreting material evidence and associated information for the public (Moore 1997), one of the most significant functions of museums is to exhibit collections. Furthermore, they also carry out political and ideological tasks which are in accordance with their status as a preserver of the community's cultural heritage (Duncan 1991).

The public may regard museums as places for the conservation and exhibition of material evidence of humanity and its environment for the purpose of study, education or enjoyment. However, museums also play an important role in fostering a sense of identity and pride (Moore 1997). Museums are deployed

as a means to exhibit and represent national identity (Duncan 1991). This appears to be true in Brunei Darussalam.

In Brunei Darussalam, the overarching policy of the Museums Department is to promote research and stimulate interest in the rich cultural and natural heritage of Brunei Darussalam. Another purpose of the museums is to protect and conserve this heritage. To ensure the museums department's policy is realised, it has implemented such strategies as exhibitions in the museums. The exhibitions in these museums are always linked to represent Brunei Darussalam as a whole.

To date, there are three museums in Brunei Darussalam. Two of them, the Brunei Museum and the Malay Technology Museum, are located at one of the historic locations in Brunei Darussalam, i.e. Kota Batu, whereas the Royal Regalia Building is located in the heart of the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. Each of these museums' exhibitions has its own theme and the purpose of each is to in some way define Bruneian national identity.

#### The Brunei Museum.

The Brunei Museum, the nation's oldest, was established in 1965 and first housed at the Civic Centre in the capital. However, in 1968 construction of a new building began and was completed in 1970. It was officially opened in 1972 by the Queen of England, Elizabeth II. The galleries in this museum are divided into six sections, each of which has a display theme. The themes are Islamic Artefacts, Oil and Gas, Natural History, Brunei Traditional Culture, Brunei Darussalam Archaeology and History, and Brunei Shipwreck exhibition. In addition, there are temporary exhibitions held in the lobby of the museum. When I was in Brunei Darussalam in September 2004 for my final round of fieldwork, I visited the Brunei Museum and viewed a temporary exhibition on the archaeological discovery at Sungai Limau Manis under the theme of Secret of the River (*Rahsia dari Sungai*). Among artefacts put on display were artefacts which are believed to be weaving implements. The exact date when these implements were used is not known, but it is estimated between the tenth and thirteenth centuries (Pg Karim 2003: 12).

Gallery 1 is located on the ground floor and I was informed the gallery is currently loaned to the Department of Mosques. It exhibits photographs and artefacts used in mosques, such as *beduk* (drum) and *mimbar* (sermon podium). It also provides historical accounts of the coming of Islam to Brunei Darussalam.

Gallery 2, also situated on the ground floor, exhibits the history and technology of the oil industry in Brunei Darussalam. The displays include the different processes of oil exploration, such as digging, filtration, transportation and marketing. There are also posters depicting maps of Brunei Darussalam's oil fields, photographs and audio visual recordings related to the industry.

Gallery 3 is situated on the upper floor and exhibits artefacts of the shipwrecks found in Brunei Darussalam's water in 1998. Gallery 4 is also situated on the upper floor and houses the 'Brunei Traditional Culture' which displays Brunei material culture, such as artefacts used in life-cycle rituals. Replicas of traditional games, food, artefacts made of wood and brass, such as *bedil* (cannon), *celapa* (betel container), and different types of biscuit moulds are also exhibited. In addition, there are duplications of traditional woven cloths.

The main rites of passage exhibit focuses on a Brunei Malay wedding ceremony. The display depicts the old wedding tradition (see plate 134). It displays the earlier way of a bride and groom sitting-in state on their bed (see plate 135). In the old days, the bed was also used as a dais for the wedding couple, but now a special dais is placed in the living room. The bed is fully decorated with ornamental bolsters and pillows locally known as *bantal tujuh keturunan* (pillows of seven generations), and *lawangan* (decorated textiles used especially to adorn the beds of newly wedding couple). Other ornaments used in Brunei Malay weddings, such as the *bunga dian* (decorated candles) and *tompang* (decorated eggs) are also on display. Replicas of different types of food that were served during weddings, as well as the indoor games played during wedding celebrations are also on display. The artefacts are labelled individually. The different ways of wearing clothing during wedding ceremonies is shown.



**Plate 134: Brunei Malay wedding on display at the Brunei Museum.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

Traditional woven cloths represent one aspect of the material culture of Brunei. Traditional cloths are displayed in the form of clothing and furnishings used during wedding ceremonies. There are four couples of mannequins dressed in wedding attire which each couple wearing a different style and colour of clothing. In addition, the mannequins are adorned with traditional ornaments, such as bangles, headdress, and chains. There are three different types of male head-dress (*dastar*) made from traditional woven cloth and each is folded in a different way. In addition, archive photographs taken at Brunei Malay weddings are also mounted.



**Plate 135: The bride and groom sitting-in state on exhibit.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

Gomez-Pena (1992) argues that assertions of cultural centrality are also assertions of hegemony. In this museum, the 'Brunei Traditional Culture' gallery exhibits artefacts that have been produced by the Malays. In this gallery, traditional cloths are depicted as part of the customs and culture of the Malay people. The display shows artefacts from the dominant culture and community in Brunei Darussalam i.e. *puak* Brunei, but does not represent the customs and cultures of Brunei's whole society. Thus, the selection of particular artefacts from the dominant culture to be exhibited is one way of fostering hegemonic culture as the national culture.

#### The Malay Technology Museum.

The Malay Technology Museum of Brunei is located near the Brunei Museum. The building was donated by the Royal Dutch Shell Group of companies and was built to mark the achievement of full independence in 1984. However, the Museum was officially opened in 1988 by the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam.

There are three exhibition halls in this museum. Gallery 1 shows architectural structure of houses in Kampong Ayer from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are six model houses exhibited, backed up by diorama,

depicting a panoramic view of Kampong Ayer. Models of boats and mannequins are used to enhance the exhibits.

Gallery 2 is the Traditional Technology of Kampong Ayer gallery, which exhibits various types of handicrafts and cottage industries found in Kampong Ayer. The display includes *memburis perahu* (boat construction), *membuat atap daun* (roof making), *pertukangan emas* (gold smithing), *pertukangan perak* (silver smithing), *menuang tembaga* (brass casting), *pertukangan besi* (iron smithing) and *bertenun kain* (cloth weaving). The exhibition is set up in a diorama depicting a panoramic view of Kampong Ayer and provides a realistic effect. In addition, examples of handicrafts products are on display.

In the weaving exhibit, traditional woven textiles are depicted as the traditional production of Brunei Malay women. A model house is erected, which accommodates the Malay loom. A mannequin is used to show the weaving process (see plate 136). A placard which has a brief description of weaving is near the display. The tools used to weave the cloths are also exhibited, and each of them is labelled accordingly. Furthermore, there are more than twenty pieces of finished cloth exhibited and labelled, indicating different types and designs of the traditional cloths produced in Brunei Darussalam, for example *kain Si Lubang bangsi*, *kain bunga betabur* and *kain Jong sarat* (see plate 137).



**Plate 136: Weaving Display.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Department of Museums)



**Plate 137: Different designs of locally woven textiles on exhibition.**

(Photo: Courtesy of Department of Museums.)

Gallery 3 displays the traditional technology of the inland people. It shows models of traditional Kedayan, Dusun and Murut houses. In addition, a model of a Punan hut is also displayed, as the Punan are one of the indigenous groups living in Brunei Darussalam. Traditional daily activities of these ethnic groups are also displayed, such as the process of making sago, a man making a blow pipe, and a woman pounding paddy to remove the husks with a wooden pestle and mortar.

Although the establishment costs of the Malay Technology Museum were donated by the petroleum company of Shell Group, the museum is under the management of the Museums Department and financed by the state. According to the Curator of the Malay Technology Museum<sup>1</sup>, this museum has three main objectives. The first is to collect ethnographic artefacts. The second is to encourage research by the museum staff and other researchers which is related to the collected artefacts. And the third is to exhibit the collections for the public. The exhibition in this museum was set up to show the public the traditional architecture and technology of the people of Brunei Darussalam so as to generate a sense of appreciation of the state's cultural heritage. Much of the displayed technology and architecture no longer exists or is rarely utilised indicating the government's interest in documenting its history. The exhibition of traditional

architecture and technology is an attempt to show their connection to its ancestry, but it is also useful in that it is designed to make the state look progressive. It shows that the state is concerned with the life of the people and serves as a preserver of their past achievements (Duncan 1991).

The theme of the Malay Technology Museum is in line with the national philosophy of 'Malay Islamic Monarchy'. According to one of the interpretations of Malayness, there are seven indigenous or ethnic groups that are considered to make up the Malay race in Brunei Darussalam, as noted earlier. There is no particular statement indicating such interpretation anywhere in the museum; the term 'Malay' as used in the name of the museum is deemed to self explanatory. The establishment of this museum, as well as the exhibition of artefacts in this museum, is used immediately by the state as a process to externalize and inculcate the sense of national identity. The recontextualisation of the architecture and technology is seen as the heritage of the nation and as a sign of civilization (Duncan 1991).

According to the Curator of the Malay Technology Museum, the museum is given the mandate to collect, do research and exhibit the cultural heritage of Malay ethnic groups in Brunei Darussalam. Yet, it appeared to me that the exhibitions do not fully realise this mandate. Not all the Malay groups have exhibits of their architecture and technology. Most of the exhibits focus on the artefacts and traditional industries of *puak* Brunei. There is an attempt at wider coverage in a sense that other ethnic groups' cultures are exhibited as part of the wider cultural effort of a nation to symbolise local identity constituting the national culture. The architecture and technology of other Malay ethnic groups, Dusun, Murut, and Kedayan, are also on display, although the rest of the Malay ethnic groups, including the Bisaya, Belait and Tutong, have been overlooked. In addition, there is architecture and technology from the Punan on display. However, the very centrality of the *puak* Brunei culture in these exhibitions can be considered also to undermine the more encompassing representation of national identity.



### The Royal Regalia Building.

The Royal Regalia Building was opened to commemorate the 1992 Silver Jubilee of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah's succession to the throne. The royal regalia and other objects, including gifts and the personal collection of the Sultan, are exhibited. The building consists of four galleries.

Gallery 1 displays regalia used during the Coronation of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, including the royal chariot on which the Sultan rode during the royal procession of the enthronement. It also contains the *Nobat diraja* (royal orchestra), consisting of *Nakara* (royal drum), *gendang labik* (different kind of drum), *serunai* (oboe), gongs and *canang* (different kind of gong), as well as umbrellas of multiple colours, royal spears and royal shields.

Gallery 2 contains a biography of the Sultan covering from his childhood to the time of his coronation. There are also photographs and objects related to the Sultan, including a replica of the throne at the *Lapau* (Parliamentary House) where the Sultan was declared as ruler, the crowns of the Sultan and Raja Isteri (the Queen), and *keris si Naga* (the Kris called the Dragon). In addition the traditional costumes worn by the Sultan and his wife during his installation upon the throne (*Istiadat Berpuspa*) are on display. At the balcony outside the gallery, the displays include a large frame containing the signatures of the Economic leaders who attended the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) meeting hosted by Brunei Darussalam in year 2000. The frame was decorated with traditional woven cloth of *Sukmaindera* design.

The third hall exhibits the Silver Jubilee anniversary celebration. Combinations of models, dioramas, photographs, objects and videos have been used to document the event. Among the displays is a replica of the hall where the Silver Jubilee reception was held, the royal carriage and a replica of the *pemajangan* (the decorative structure erected at the main entrance of the palace, which is adorned with various types of royal banners and insignia). Furthermore, souvenirs and gifts presented to the Sultan by his foreign counterparts and subjects are also on display.

Among the gifts are several examples of traditional woven cloths that were given to the Sultan during his Silver Jubilee Anniversary to the throne and his birthday celebrations. The traditional woven cloths long rectangular pieces, like the male *sinjang* but there are also traditional fabrics which were exclusively woven with a special dedication to the Sultan. One traditional cloth presented by one of the *Mukim* (a settlement comprising of several villages) is decorated with a verse from the Quran, Al-Fatihah.

The fourth gallery is the constitutional history gallery and shows development of Brunei's constitution. Audio visual and archival material are used to explain the pre-1959 period, the 1959 constitution and agreement, the 1971 agreement, the proclamation of Independence and the post-independence structure of government. A replica of the meeting hall where the constitution was signed and photographs taken during each phase are also displayed. Among the photographs on display are those of the late Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III, other dignitaries of Brunei Darussalam and representatives of the British government during the proclamation of the Brunei Constitution in 1959 (see plate 138). This constitution was significant, as Brunei Darussalam embarked upon the project of taking over internal independence and sovereignty. During that ceremony, the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam and local dignitaries wore Malay traditional costumes of traditionally woven cloths.

The exhibitions in this building are noticeable as an effort to reflect the authority and grandeur of the Monarch. Artefacts or objects that personally belong to the Sultan and other members of the royal family, including those used on ceremonial occasions and at historical events, are on display. These artefacts or objects are understood as regalia that display power, status and achievement. In one way or another, the displays of objects demonstrate something about the Sultan, including his splendour, glory and wisdom (Duncan 1991). The displays of photographs of the Sultan and other members of the royal family wearing traditional clothes during ceremonial and historical events show the importance of these clothes as officially signifying the position of the Sultan, his wife and other members of the royal family at the top of the social hierarchy.

The gifts presented to the Sultan by his counterparts and his subjects and other objects of his collections are also put on display in the building. Included are several pieces of traditional woven textiles. The display of the gifts signifies the appreciation not only from the collector, in this case the Sultan, who has given approval for his collection to be put on display and shared with visitors, but also on the part of the givers for the Sultan's willingness to honour their gifts by exhibiting them and letting them be enjoyed by the public. Hence, the display of the objects exhibits the close relation between the ruler and his subjects and fulfils his image as the 'caring monarch'.

Displays in the constitutional historical gallery are also significant in indexing the sovereignty of the contemporary state. The proclamation of the Brunei Constitution in 1959 only granted internal independence; nevertheless, it was a remarkable achievement by the late Sultan to uphold this sovereignty. This was important as the base for Brunei Darussalam to uphold its social, cultural and religious integrity as internal independence granted the Sultan control of internal matters, especially in preventing interference with Malay customs and Islamic religion. The photographs put on display in this gallery, depicting traditional woven cloths as the official attire worn by Brunei's ruler and other dignitaries during the signing of treaties for the independence of Brunei Darussalam, signify a reaffirmation of Brunei national identity, although at the time Brunei Darussalam was still a British protectorate.

The Royal Regalia building is located on the site where the statue of Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Britain from 1940-1945 and 1951-1955, used to be. The statue was a gift from the British government to the Brunei government, but is now in storage. The reconstruction of the site for the Royal Regalia signifies the assertion of the sovereign power of the monarch. It also signifies the replacement of colonial power and the re-assertion of the Sultan's power and his capability of greatness and 'self-rule' (Anderson 1991: 181). Although the administration system introduced by the British has not been totally rejected, the implication is clear that the monarch is the absolute power of the state. The removal of the statue conforms to Islamic teaching, which prohibits the

display of a human figure, and thus, reaffirms the sovereignty of Islam in Brunei Darussalam.



**Plate 138: Archive picture of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien during the signing of the Brunei Constitution, on display at Brunei Constitution gallery.**

(Photo: Courtesy of the Brunei Museums).

### **The Process of Nationalisation of Heritage.**

In addition to the Department of Museums, which plays a direct role in exhibiting cultural artefacts, there are also other government departments that work to ensure the continuity of traditional woven textiles as a manifestation of identity. Brunei culture, of which traditional woven textiles are a part, has been increasingly formulated as the distinctive Bruneian national imagery that is linked to the state and regarded as a product of the people. Hence, Brunei art, including traditional woven cloth in particular, has come to be associated with the formation of Brunei national identity.

The embracement of traditional textiles into national imagery is indicated by the widespread acquisition by government institutions, as well as private companies. The assimilation of traditional textiles into national culture has been advocated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which has arranged for their display at the International Convention Centre, located in Jalan Berakas in the national capital. The Centre is used for national and international functions, such as APEC meetings and Universiti Brunei Darussalam's Convocation ceremonies<sup>2</sup>.

Traditional woven cloth motifs have been adapted and used to decorate the walls at the Centre (see plate 139). In addition, traditional textiles of different designs, such as *kain beragi* and *kain Si Pugut*, have been framed and hung on the walls and in most of the conference rooms. Because such venues are regularly used for national and international events, they have been particularly selected to display traditional cloths and to duplicate their motifs. Through the displays the guests are guided towards thinking through a nationalist concept that the motifs are related to mark Brunei identity.



**Plate 139: Designs of traditional woven textile used for interior decoration in the Main Hall at the International Convention Centre.**

(Photo: Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah).

The Ministry of Development is another example of a government institution which uses traditional textiles as a manifestation of Brunei identity. The Ministry uses traditional cloths as part of its interior decoration as well as adopting the names of such textiles designs for some of the rooms and the multi-purpose hall in its building. For instance, the private meeting room of the minister is decorated with an orange coloured *Si Lubang bangsi* design (see plate 140). In addition, all the conference rooms, lounge room and a multipurpose hall are also decorated with traditional cloths; all these rooms are decorated with certain designs and named according to the designs. There are the *Si Lubang bangsi* lounge, which is decorated with *Si Lubang bangsi* design, the *Si Pugut*

conference room, adorned with *Si Pugut* design, and the *Sukmaindera* conference room, decorated with the *Sukmaindera* design. All these rooms are located on the sixth floor of the building; at the same level with the Minister's office. Another meeting room called the *Arab gegati* conference room is located on the fourth floor, whose interior is decorated with *Arab gegati* (rhombus) motifs (see plate 141). The multipurpose hall, named the *Dewan Bertabur* (Hall of Scattered), which is situated on the ground floor, is decorated with a scattered arrangement pattern with rotating floral motifs.



**Plate 140: The private meeting room of the Minister of Development.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 141: The Arab gegati conference room.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

Besides government buildings, hotels provide a good example of private companies displaying traditional textiles as cultural production and national identity. As one of the venues frequented by travellers and tourists, hotels not only provide accommodation and services; they also play a significant role in the representation of cultural and national identity. For instance, the Centre Point, one of the established hotels in Brunei Darussalam, uses traditional textiles framed and hung in the lobby of the hotel as part of its decoration.

The logoization of traditional textiles to represent national identity has also been actively disseminated to the public through media. Motifs and designs of traditional textiles have been reproduced, such as on book covers, invitation cards, wrapping papers, gift boxes and bags. Such measures are not only advocated by the government and private institutions, but also have been supported by individuals, including members of the royal family.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport is one of the government institutions that plays an important role in preserving the continuity of Brunei culture. This is in line with the mission of the ministry to preserve and develop the people of Brunei Darussalam by strengthening values based on the national philosophy, Malay Islamic Monarchy, thus, it is responsible for providing images

representing the national identity. The Ministry looks after several departments, including the Museums Department and the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre, which have been the most active promoters of national icons through material representations.

The Literature Bureau of Brunei Darussalam, under this ministry, is responsible for publishing textbooks and general readings. There are many books published by this department that reproduce motifs and designs of traditional woven cloth for book covers, although the content of the books may be on entirely different topics. For example, the *Si Pugut* design has been used to decorate the book cover of a textbook on financial terminology, the *Sukmaindera* design for a textbook on the terminology of mathematics, the *bunga betabur* for a physics textbook, and *kain beragi bunga betabur* for that on chemical terminology (see plate 142). Although it appears to be that there is no particular affinity of the design selected for the field of the textbook, the designs and patterns were selected by the assigned illustrator so as to ‘depict the local flavour that signifies the Brunei identity’ (Siti Zaleha, pers comm, 2002).



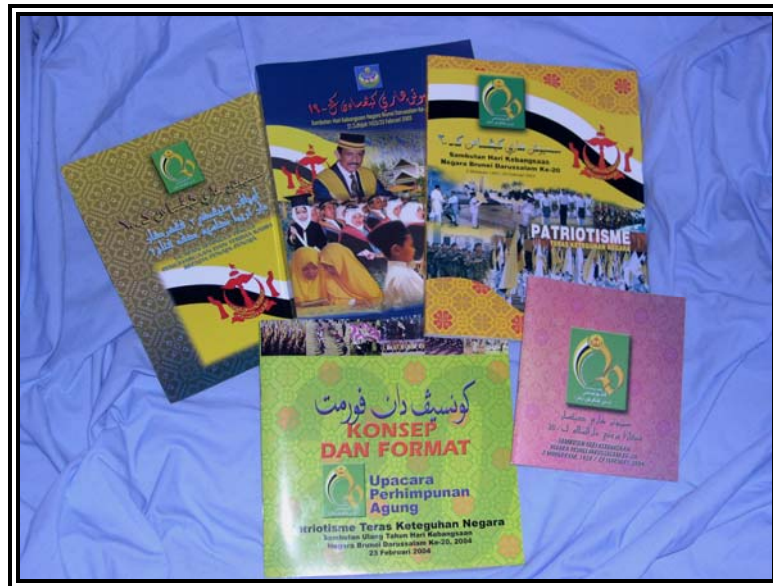
**Plate 142: Different designs of traditional woven cloths used for textbook covers.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

Brunei (national) identity or culture has been manifested as well in the motifs and designs of traditional textiles reproduced to decorate the backdrop as well as the cover of the programme books for Brunei’s National Day Anniversary

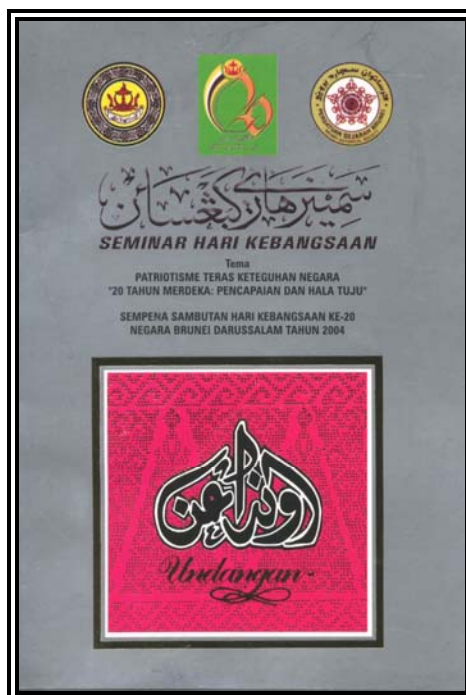


in 2003 and 2004. These programmes were distributed to participants and guests at the celebration (see plate 143). For the seminar jointly organised by the Brunei Historical Association and National Day Committee to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the National Day of Brunei Darussalam, senior officials were invited to attend the opening and closing ceremonies of the event with invitation cards decorated with the reproduction of a motif from a traditional woven cloth (see plate 144).



**Plate 143: Programme books and souvenirs distributed at anniversaries of National Day of Brunei Darussalam.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 144: Invitation card to the opening and closing ceremonies of National Day Seminar, 2004.**

(Courtesy of Dr Haji Abdul Latif Bin Haji Ibrahim).

During the royal wedding of the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, the Information Department reproduced one of the traditional woven cloths designs, *kain beragi bertabur* (chequered design with scattered motifs) to decorate the bags containing press release information about the royal wedding that were distributed to all foreign journalists covering the events. At the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Foundation of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, *Sukmaindera* design was also reproduced on souvenir bags that were distributed to guests attending the event (see plate 145).



**Plate 145: Designs of traditional woven cloths reproduced for gift bags.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

Traditional dance is also choreographed and staged occasionally either at national or international events. A song named '*kain Jong sarat*' was also composed and usually used to back the dance. The lyrics of the song grounds traditional textiles as the national icon, as well as a symbol of Brunei identity (see table 3). The lyric acknowledges the antiquity of traditional textile, thus gives it the legitimisation of being a great cultural tradition. In addition, it also tells the story of how traditional textiles play an important role in connecting social relationships, as well as portraying the creativity of Brunei weavers. At the dance, *kain Jong sarat* (one of the traditional textile designs) are usually used for costumes and as decorations of the dancing instruments of the dancers.

Malay	English Translation
<i>Kain Jong Sarat tenunan orang Brunei</i>	<i>Jong sarat</i> textile woven by Brunei people
<i>Adunan tangan jari jemari gemalai</i>	Made up by swaying of fingers
<i>Kain Jong Sarat dipakai gadis jelita</i>	<i>Jong sarat</i> fabric worn by beautiful lady
<i>Berkilau berseri rukun indah coraknya</i>	Shining and glowing beautiful harmonic pattern
<i>Kain Jong Sarat tenunan memikat</i>	<i>Jong sarat</i> fabric an attractive woven textile
<i>Kain bersulami benang emas</i>	the fabric embellished with gold threads
<i>Wujudnya sejak zaman nenek moyang</i>	exist since the time of great grandparents
<i>Penyambung kasih pengikat cinta</i>	connects and tied the love
<i>abadi sayang</i>	forever loving
<i>Kain Jong Sarat rangkaian aneka cipta</i>	<i>Jong Sarat</i> fabric arrangement of various creation
<i>Bunga bertabur bunga kembang berputar</i>	Scattered pattern of rotating floral motifs
<i>Corak air muleh digandingi pucuk rebung</i>	Coiling water motif accompanied by bamboo shoot
<i>Lambang peribadi budaya yang agung</i>	The symbol of great cultural identity

**Table 3: The lyrics of *Kain Jong sarat*.**

Apart from government institutions, locally owned and operated private institutions have also played a significant role in fostering national cultural awareness. In relation to traditional textiles, several private institutions have taken up the image of traditionally woven textiles to decorate miscellaneous articles, such as desktop calendars, covers of account books, and organisers, all of which have been distributed to their clients. For instance, the Islamic Development Bank of Brunei (IDBB), which was launched in the 1990's, uses the image of a traditional textile of full arrangement pattern with *bunga telapok* (floral motif) as the background of its official account books and auto teller machine cards (see plate 146). In 2004, the Islamic Bank of Brunei and the Islamic Trust Fund of

Brunei used reproductions of locally woven textiles designs for their calendar, using a different design for each month of the year (see plate 147).



**Plate 146: Reproduction of traditional woven cloth's design for cover of account book and ATM card at IDBB.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).



**Plate 147: Different designs of traditional cloths reproduced on desk-top calendars.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)

Selected designs of traditional cloths were also reproduced for gift wraps and envelopes. For instance, Her Majesty Raja Isteri (the Queen) of Brunei Darussalam chose *Sukmaindera* and *Si Pugut* designs to be reproduced on gift wraps and envelopes. At last Ramadhan (October 2004), my mother and aunts were given gifts by Her Majesty Raja Isteri, and I found that designs used for traditional woven cloths were reproduced for the gift wrappings. Another example, one of the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's sisters, Princess Hajah Masnah, also used the reproduction of traditional textile designs for the gift wrappings and bags (see plate 148). The reproduction of traditional textiles' designs and motifs has also been increasing among Bruneians for miscellaneous articles. For instance, certain designs and motifs of traditional textiles are reproduced on book covers, such as copies of *surah Yaasin* sponsored personally and donated to relatives and friends to commemorate deceased family members.



**Plate 148: Traditional woven cloth designs chosen by Princess Hajah Masnah for gift bags and wrappings.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah)



### **Commercialisation.**

Myers (2001b: 165-204) in his article, *The Wizards of Oz: Nation, State, and the Production of Aboriginal Fine Art*, discuss the necessity of a commercial market to ensure the continuity of the production of contemporary Aboriginal acrylic paintings, but notes the difficulty faced by painters and their advisers of maintaining their authenticity which emerges from religious value. Myers shows that the attempts to match qualitative value with monetary value represent an effort to mediate the value regimes, which emphasise indigenous distinctions. The market has also provided physical, economic and semiotic changes to acrylic paintings.

In Brunei Darussalam, commercialisation has also exerted significant impact upon the production of traditional textiles. Not only has it provided an economic orientation, but it also reinforces the qualitative integrity of locally woven traditional textiles. A study of Aboriginal arts conducted in Australia by Timothy Pascoe in 1981 suggested that the production of small souvenirs for sale would lead to deterioration in quality (Myers 2001b:185). According to Prangwattanakun and Naenna (1998: 61-62), the incorporation of hand-woven textiles into national culture and the promotion of hand-woven garments for official wear advocated by Queen Sirikit has influenced the market of hand-woven textile significantly in Thailand. They point out that there are three distinct markets for hand-woven textiles in Thailand. The first is a high class market for textiles woven by the best weavers using the finest materials. The second is the middle class market, especially among the civil servants who often wear traditionally oriented costumes on Fridays. Finally there is the lower class market which is the largest market. The cloth produced for this market is of relatively poor quality and is generally made of synthetic fibre. In Brunei Darussalam, the market for traditional textiles is mainly for local consumption of all classes, but such textiles are also produced for tourist art and souvenirs. The quality of traditional textiles produced for those markets remains of the finest quality, although the designs for certain materials may be simplified to accommodate the demand of the lower class market. The production of

traditional textiles for tourist art and souvenirs has also enhanced the quality of the textile. My weaver informants told me that the need to display to buyers or consumers the fine quality of Brunei textiles as an expression of Brunei identity, as well as market competition, has actually motivated the weavers to produce the finest quality of traditional textiles. Furthermore, commercialisation has actually motivated creativity among the weavers and enriched designs and colours of traditional textiles, while maintaining their authenticity which originates from their handmade features. Therefore, commercial activity has not lowered the standard of traditional textiles.

The establishment of the Brunei Arts and Handicraft Training Centre in 1975 was one of the most significant measures taken by the government to ensure the continuity of Brunei handicrafts, including traditional textiles. From its establishment up to 2004, 441 weavers have graduated from the centre (Matassim 2004: 5) and over a hundred weavers are actively engaged in weaving activities. From among these graduates, fourteen of the trained weavers have set up their own weaving businesses, twenty-five practise at the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre workshop at Berakas, and the rest work on their own at home (Fatimah and Norwatiza 2004). In addition to formally trained weavers from the Centre, there are also other weavers who have learned their skill from their mothers and close relatives, or at the weaving training centre in the Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah Foundation.

Although there is no definite record, my informants told me that traditional textiles have been commoditised for centuries. They also informed me weavers and Brunei Malays *pengalu* (salespersons) have exchanged them for commodities, such as rice and livestock, or money. However, it was only in the 1980s that such textiles became intensively commercialised in Brunei Darussalam. The commercialisation of traditional textiles has been supported by the government for cultural preservation as well as economic enhancement. The government exempted weaving business people, who are categorised as either small or medium entrepreneurs (SME) from paying tax, and there is no income tax in Brunei Darussalam. It is difficult to determine to what extent sales from



traditional textiles have contributed to the national economy, as specific detail in the national statistical data are not available. However, it has certainly generated income for the weavers, especially those who have established their own business. The government has also been providing assistance and promotional opportunities for weavers and entrepreneurs to enter possible profitable markets. Publicity is given through exhibitions and sale activities coordinated by the government, as well as private organisations. Traditional textile weavers and entrepreneurs have been given opportunities to market and exhibit their products nationally and internationally, such as in Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) countries and Japan (Fatimah & Norwatiza 2004).

Traditional cloths are mostly produced for national consumption, especially for clothing worn in ceremonial and public events, especially by the Malays, although other functional and decorative items, such as handbags, table runners, cushions and tissue box covers are also produced. Sales of such textiles are consistent throughout the year, with especially high demand during festive seasons, such as *Hari Raya Aidil Fitri* and the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam's birthday celebrations. Consistent sales of traditional textiles throughout the year are due to the fact that they are used for weddings, as well as for public functions, especially for men, all year round including during the month of Ramadhan, the Islamic fasting month<sup>3</sup>. A weaver informant estimated making a profit of about B\$4000.00-\$5000.00 per month except during *Hari Raya* when her profits grow to B\$20,000.00.

Recently, with the promotion of tourism in Brunei Darussalam, the government has also encouraged craft makers, including traditional textiles weavers to diversify their products for tourist arts. Traditional textiles for cloth are now being used for purses, covers for organisers, pencil cases and stands and jewellery boxes (see plate 149). More creative entrepreneurs have also put together small cuttings of traditional woven textiles and drawings or painting of Brunei Darussalam's scenery or landmarks.



**Plate 149: Traditional woven cloths are reproduced for souvenirs.**

(Photo: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah).

### **Conclusion.**

The representation of 'Brunei national identity' has been constructed actively, especially during the 'post-protectorate' period. The government's emphasis upon the national philosophy, Malay Islamic Monarchy, has been propagating an appreciation among the Bruneians of the values embedded in the national philosophy's integrated tenets. The representation of the national identity needs to be expressed and appropriated through material manifestations (Myers 2001a).

The utilization of all forms that are related to traditional woven textiles is only a part of the culture that is associated with national symbols. There are multiple connections between traditional textiles and the project of signifying the nation. Traditional textiles are associated with the cultural production of Brunei Darussalam and therefore authoritatively accepted as the national culture. Selected motifs, designs and colours of traditional textiles were commissioned by certain government departments for interior decorations and displays in their buildings. They are also used in hotels in a similar way. In addition, traditional textiles have been actively used in media by reproducing designs and motifs on book covers and other miscellaneous articles promoted by government and private

institutions as well as individuals. Such adoption has clearly indicated strong support by these institutions in redefining traditional textiles to construct national identity.

Commercialisation has also played a significant role, not only as economic enhancement, but also cultural integrity. Although commercialisation has been motivated by the quest for economic enhancement, it also has stimulated the connection of traditional cloths to the formulation of Brunei national identity and the redefinition of the national image.

Traditional textiles continue to influence the construction of national culture and redefinition of national identity which has been strongly promulgated by the government and supported by prominent individuals, as well as private companies. Traditional textiles are exhibited and reproduced on various media both by the government and by private institutions. They are also being commercialised to enhance the economy and preserve culture. It is not unusual for traditional textiles and other forms related to them to be adopted as the national symbol. Not only is the fabric utilised by government institutions, but it is also highly valued in the royal court, which increases its standard to that of 'high culture'. The cultural, aesthetic and economic values of the material render it suitable, as valuable imagery for national identity. The status given to traditional textiles in the society has established a linkage to 'high culture', therefore supporting it as the national icon.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Now, he is the Deputy Director, Museums Department. A new curator of the Malay Technology Museum has since been appointed.

<sup>2</sup> Since 2003, Universiti Brunei Darussalam has not used International Convention Centre for its convocation ceremony as it has utilised Chancellory Hall located at the University which was completed at the same year.

<sup>3</sup> Although ceremonies, such as weddings are not usually held during Ramadhan, instead religious events, for example the mass reading of Al-Quran (*bertadarus*) and ceremonies marking the end of reading the whole chapters in the Quran (*Khatam Al-Quran*) are commonly held either by individuals at private homes or government and private institutions where traditional cloths were usually worn by men. These events are held in the evening.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion.

Material culture has long been utilised as an expression of identity in many societies. Its role as a marker of identity has been exploited to express individual or collective identity. Traditional woven textiles have also been used to express social and political status, economic stability, ethnic and national identity. In addition, textiles have also been exchanged in the creation or confirmation of political alliance (Bayly 1986).

In Brunei Darussalam, the term ‘tradition’ has a variety of meanings. It includes worldviews, custom or *adat*, heritage and proper way of living, as well as the norms of performing activities in accordance with the culture. In this thesis, ‘tradition’ is widely defined to include not only the old practices that are passed down from older to the later generations, but also selected practices that are constructed and reconstructed and adapted by the society in general. Traditional practices and items are sustained and revived as vehicles to express cultural identity and primordial loyalty. Thus, traditional woven textiles are one of the aspects of Brunei material culture that play a central role in Brunei traditions.

Since independence, ‘tradition’ has increasingly been promoted in Brunei Darussalam, as it is part of the national philosophy, ‘Malay Islamic Monarchy’, which was also proclaimed on the Independence Day. Politicians and nationalists appeal to tradition, seeking to create national identity derived from the three pillars of the national philosophy. Tradition is used as a political symbol by the elites to legitimise the national culture, as well as a vehicle to relate to the origins of contemporary Brunei society. When the British were in power, Westernisation and modernisation started to penetrate into the society, thus influencing its social and cultural values. Later, such influences were intensified by the advancement of technology and the process of globalisation. Although not all modern Western values are contradictory to national and local values, and many are certainly embraced by Bruneians, tradition is used to remind the people of their roots since the adaptation of modern Western values must be in line with the Bruneian way.

Therefore, tradition has been appropriated to serve as a symbol of culture (Keesing 1982) representing Brunei identity.

This thesis is a study of traditional cloth and its roles in Brunei society. In Brunei society, traditional woven cloths have multiple roles whose meanings vary according to the situation in which the traditional woven cloth is utilised. They are used as ceremonial attire, as furnishing, and as decoration. In addition, traditional woven cloth has always been exchanged, as part of wedding prestations, gifts and souvenirs. On certain occasions, traditional cloths, through the elaboration of designs and colours, are used to signify in new ways rank distinctions and office differentiations. This thesis exemplifies the importance of tradition in ensuring the continuity of traditional textiles, as well as exploring the uses to which tradition is put in the project of nationalisation, commercialisation and construction of a unique Brunei national identity.

The continuity of the production and usage of traditional cloth is very much dependent on its significance in the traditions of Brunei society as a whole. The manufacturing of traditional woven textiles is heavily reliant on demand from the internal market, for such textiles are closely linked to tradition. For Bruneians, tradition is a significant aspect of life that must be preserved and maintained and whose continuity in the society must be ensured. However, for them, tradition does not necessarily hinder the society from progressing; in fact, tradition is seen as a fundamental element that forms and strengthens Brunei culture and identity. Disregarding the traditions of the society will therefore erode Bruneian identity. Thus, tradition is inculcated, reinforced and emphasised in the life of Bruneians in order to uphold cultural identity and heritage.

In Brunei society, ceremonial functions marking life cycle transitions are normally commemorated and celebrated as events that constitute tradition. Such ritual observances include wedding ceremonies, first-born child celebrations, and circumcision and puberty ceremonies. The continuation of such ceremonies commemorating rites of passage ensures that the usage of traditional woven cloth is preserved. In these ceremonies, traditional woven cloth is essential as ceremonial dress worn by celebrants. The attire is perceived to be the most

suitable and appropriate for such ceremonies. Therefore, celebrants must be clothed in the cloths of the finest aesthetic attributes, in accordance with the Malay custom that stresses the importance of aesthetic refinement, as well as cultural propriety or '*kemajalisan*'. The omission of these fabrics, although not directly transgressing social custom and religious norms, is considered improper in the eyes of other members of the society. Other than ceremonial dress, traditional cloths are also copiously used as ornamental objects on ceremonial occasions. They provide status for the occasion, reflecting the wealth and prosperity of the family.

Traditional woven textiles have long played a significant role in wedding exchange. They form part of an exchange of goods between the groom and the bride on their marriage, and are accepted as a means of making and strengthening the social relationship between the families of the marriage partners. The *Jong sarat* is 'the head of gifts' brought in a procession of the groom's gifts of clothing, accessories and other gifts that are presented to the bride at the engagement ceremony. The cloth represents the ability of the groom to provide for his bride; his ability to fulfil the request of the bride for the textiles indicates his competence as the provider and head of family. The bride also gives counter gifts to her groom, which include cooked food, traditional and modern clothing, as well as one or more pieces of traditional woven cloths. The exchange of gifts signifies the reciprocity and interrelation between the groom and bride, as well as establishing social relationships between the families of both parties.

Traditional woven cloths may be utilised at a funeral, although it is a solemn ritual. The stronger influence of Islamic teaching discourages elaborate funerals among Muslims; nonetheless, such textiles are still utilised, although such usage is not as common compared to celebration of the rites of life. They are never used for shrouds, but they can be utilised for covering the coffin. It is not usual for commoners to use traditional woven cloths at funerals; however, they may be used especially among members of the higher social classes, such as the nobles and higher non-nobles. Furthermore, such cloths may also be used at funerals by other non-Muslim Malays, such as the Dusun and Bisaya. The

employment of such fabrics can be perceived to show final respect for the dead. Moreover, the material is also used in funerals as a vehicle for the reproduction of distinction to which wealth and prestige is displayed.

Islam and modern Western values have influenced the political system in Brunei Darussalam. However, Indic customs associated with kingship remain incorporated into the rituals of Brunei royal court system. Traditional textiles also play a central role in the court ceremonies, and their production has continued to flourish to cater for the needs of the royal families, and other people from different social classes who are privileged to be invited to attend court functions. At a court function, traditional cloths are not only utilised as ceremonial dress, but they are also employed as part of the regalia and decorations. During the reign of the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien (1955-1967), sumptuary practice was regulated to distinguish status (see Pengiran Yusof 1958). The sumptuary code includes specification of regalia, personal standards, clothing and decorous manners in the royal court. This codification seeks to impose the values underlying the proper use of a set of material objects within the framework of the status system. Such codifications enact a set of proper relations between cultural goods and a system of social power as noted by Bennet, Emmison and Frow (1999: 259):

The sumptuary code set out ... explicit instructions about what is proper or improper, decorous or indecorous in the use of valued matter by the different degrees of social rank.

The discourse on the consumption of traditional textiles is focused to signify or produce 'distinction', as such textiles are used to differentiate and produce classes of people in the process of subjectification (Bourdieu 1984). The social structure of Brunei society is highly stratified and based on patrilineages. However, there have been changes in the social organisation. The recruitment of officials is no longer necessarily dependent only on birth rank. Other criteria are now also taken into account, such as academic qualifications and contribution to the nation. Although there have been some changes in the social structure, the base structure of the traditional system is still maintained, as best demonstrated in



the royal court, even though the criteria for membership in the ranks signified by various offices have changed. Hierarchical ranks are still distinguished, such as through seating arrangement, use of honorifics and gestures of respect. In addition, social stratification may also be tangibly manifested through clothing, personal standards and regalia. Traditional cloths are used as markers of status. The materials of specific colour, motif and design that are worn as part of the ceremonial attire in the royal court constitute a significant symbolism distinguishing the rank of the wearer in the social and political hierarchy. In addition to that worn by the dignitaries and higher officials, traditional woven cloth is also worn by officers and bearers of regalia for the members of the royal family. In this case, certain colours and designs worn by these officers and bearers not only indicate their position, but most significantly the rank of the personnel for whom the regalia are borne. The utilisation of traditional woven cloth in the royal court appears not only to indicate individual identity, but also collective identity. The upholding of the differentiated frame of the traditionally based social structure has maintained the continuity of the production and consumption of traditional woven textiles so as to denote the rank of the wearer or possessor.

The development of the economic and educational system in Brunei Darussalam has contributed to social and political changes. Better economic conditions have enabled Brunei Darussalam to improve its infrastructure, including the system of education. Bruneians enjoy a free education of high standard. Many who are qualified are given the opportunities to pursue tertiary education either locally or abroad at government expense. Upon completion of their studies, many of them are appointed to hold senior positions in government departments conferring on them higher political, as well as social status. Therefore, such development of the system not only provides avenues for social mobility, but also political opportunities.

The transformation of the political system has also contributed to the intensified creation and consumption of traditional textiles. Thus, they remain in use to distinguish rank. When Brunei Darussalam reclaimed its independence

after years of British protectorate status, it gained its autonomy to rule and set up its own system of governing. Independent Brunei Darussalam is structured as a constitutional sultanate, and the monarch is both the chief of state and head of government. However, a Council of Cabinet Ministers has been appointed, presided over by the Monarch. Appointment of a minister does not necessarily depend upon noble descent; ministers of non-noble ancestry may also be selected. Therefore, the reform of the system of government has also provided political and social mobility.

One of the ways in which such status may be shown is through clothing. At the royal court, specific modes and colours of clothing are prescribed, including for ministers and senior officials. The patterns, designs and colours of clothing denote the status of the wearer. The change of the political system has intensified the production and consumption of traditional textiles as more designs and colours are created or reproduced to distinguish different levels of officials, thus accommodating the reformed system of government.

On occasions beyond those of the royal court where the colour code of dressing is not specified, traditional or national attire is also often worn. On such occasions traditional woven cloths are manipulated by higher senior officers to distinguish themselves from other people. During these occasions, colour of the costume does not necessarily denote social or political status. However, types and designs of the woven clothes are skilfully exploited to display personal prominence. More intricate designs are commonly selected, as the economic value of the material very much depends on the intricacy of the design, thus conspicuously displaying the higher price of the piece. The ability of such a person to acquire an intricate design indicates that he possess higher economic status, which usually comes parallel with higher social or political position. Thus, conspicuous consumption of traditional textiles is one mode of status distinction within the Bruneian social and political order.

Weiner (in Myers 2001a: 13) insists that exchange or giving is related to politics and to the production of hierarchies, recognising the significance of political manipulation and strategies. In Brunei Darussalam, traditional woven

textiles have been offered to sustain political relationships, as they are utilised as gifts given by the Sultan to newly appointed or installed traditional officials at their investiture ceremony. Traditional cloths are granted to appointed or inaugurated officials signifying their admittance to a higher privileged position, as well as signifying a presentation of elements of duties and responsibilities to them. Traditional textiles have also been exchanged with foreign delegates who have come to visit Brunei Darussalam. Such exchange is not only as a souvenir, but it establishes goodwill, communication and consolidation of the relationship between the two parties (Schneider 1987), and also signifies to the visiting dignitaries that they should observe Brunei norms of appropriateness while visiting.

Traditional cloths are also used as a tribute to the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam by his subjects signifying both praise of the Sultan and subjection to him, especially during anniversary celebrations, such as the Sultan's birthday and the anniversary of his accession to the throne. The textiles have been offered to show the subjects' gratitude and loyalty to the Sultan as the protector, as well as the head of the state. The exchange affirms a primordial contract which enshrines the reciprocal and mutual (yet still hierarchical) obligation between them (Shelton 1992).

The use of traditional textiles is no longer restricted to 'traditional' ceremonial occasions, such as rites of passage celebrations and royal court functions. Now they are used much more broadly, for example, at national and international events as appropriate clothing, gifts and emblems. The traditional textiles have become one of the icons of the country. They are also utilised in new ceremonies to celebrate successes and achievements, and anniversaries, such as convocation ceremonies of higher educational institutions, Teachers' Day and the National Day anniversary. In addition, ceremonies to commemorate historical events in the Islamic calendar, such as the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad, *Isra Mikraj* (the date commemorating the Prophet's Night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem) and *Maal Hijrah* (Islamic New Year) also specify traditional textiles as *baju Kebangsaan* (national attire), especially at ceremonies

which have been organised by the state. Unlike in the royal court ceremonial context, the colour of the attire is not specified, as there is no restriction of colour insisted during these functions. Many men, especially when attending special occasions, wear locally woven cloth. On certain occasions, such as Teachers' Day, traditional cloths are also worn by women. Traditional cloths are usually exclusively worn by women as ceremonial dress at ceremonies held for them commemorating life crisis rituals and at royal court functions. It is also possible for certain women, such as the mother and close relatives of the bride and groom to wear traditional cloth as part of their clothing at their family's wedding ceremonies, thus signifying their position in the family. However, it is not common for them to wear such cloth on other occasions. However, at ceremonies, such as Teachers' Day, female teachers receiving acknowledgement are prescribed to wear *kain kapit* when receiving their awards. The wearing of traditional cloth for women at these events is more of an 'invention' to establish a link with Brunei identity. Apart from clothing, traditional cloths are also used as souvenirs. The traditional cloths are exclusively designed for certain occasions and they are given to selected people to acknowledge their contributions at the events. Therefore, the utilisation of traditional textiles is significant not only as an attempt to establish continuity with the past (Hobsbawn 1983), but also as an emergent expression of nationalism.

As a way of fostering national awareness, traditional textiles are also incorporated into the official attire of certain government departments and private companies. Textiles with specific patterns are specially designed for each institution, and specific designs and colours are used to denote rank within the institution. The clothes are not worn on a daily basis, but on specific occasions. The adoption of traditional textiles as part of the official attire, especially among men, has been one of the factors that has contributed to the continuity of the usage and production of traditional woven cloth in Brunei Darussalam. Furthermore, such adoption also shows traditional cloth being appropriated as an 'objectification of national identity' (Myers 2001a: 44).

The use of traditional woven cloth in the construction of national culture or identity has been actively propagated by the government. There are new designs created for officials in certain ministries and departments, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jabatan Adat Istiadat Negara and Grand Chamberlain Office as part of their uniform. These uniforms are worn on specified occasions, such as upon the presentation of credential letters to newly appointed ambassadors and others. Furthermore, traditional cloth has also been conspicuously used and displayed during state functions, as well as cultural performances. For example, during the National Day Anniversary, the clothes are not only worn by guests and committee members but also worn by the participants involved in the celebration. The materials have also been used by dancers performing traditional dances. A special song entitled '*Jong sarat*' has also been composed. These measures indicate the significance of traditional textiles in the reconstruction of nationalism as propagated by the government.

The objectification of national identity by means of traditional textiles has also been recontextualised through exhibition, media and commercialisation. Such recontextualisation has drawn considerable attention, and they are considered as sites of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). The incorporation of traditional textiles into the project of nation building and national identity was taken from the romantic nationalism which conceived a characteristic national spirit or culture, objectified materially in the cultural forms of the national subject (Myers 2001a: 26-27). Therefore, the circulation of traditional cloth either through exhibition, media or commerce constitutes objectification that contributes to the production of the nation.

The role played by the government and private institutions has been crucial in locating traditional textiles to represent national identity. It is clear that exhibition is important not only as a medium of representation, but also as a form of cultural or ideological production, as things that are exhibited construct a framework for the representation of people, their culture and history (Myers 2001a). Museums have been one of the most important institutions that are object-centred to represent people and culture. In Brunei Darussalam, all

museums are funded by the government. Thus, the museum exhibitions are used as a means of expressing nation-state identity. Apart from museums, other government agencies also play a prominent role in ensuring Brunei cultural identity is well represented by adapting traditional cloths as part of the interior decorations and displays in individual departments.

The recontextualisation of traditional woven cloth as emblems of national culture is not limited to exhibition. The motif and designs of traditional woven cloths have also been reproduced by public and private sectors as book covers, invitations and greeting cards, souvenirs, and in other forms as manifestations of Brunei identity. Furthermore, new motifs and designs are recreated or reconstructed to fit with the specific themes of particular occasions. Therefore, the reproduction of motifs and designs of traditional cloths for printed materials at these events indicates a salient construction of political and cultural identities.

Commercialisation is also seen as one way of objectifying national identity. The status of traditional cloth as a commodity for consumption involves forms of commercial value that have the capacity to articulate national identity and authenticity, as well as contribute to economic development. Traditional textiles have been commoditised and commercialised. Commercialisation is also one of the factors that ensures the continuity of the production and usage of traditional cloth in Brunei society. It not only provides economic value in the market, but also embodies cultural and social value. The outstanding characteristics of the traditional cloths have been their intricate and beautiful designs and vibrant colours. The availability of various colours of threads in the market has made possible more options, thus providing the opportunity for weavers to be more creative in ways that enable them to produce attractive fabrics. These characteristics have also made the cloths desirable to consumers, thus contributing to the economic value of the fabrics in the market, while maintaining cultural integrity without having to sacrifice authenticity.

The formulation of national culture is seen as necessary to establish social solidarity and maintain political loyalty. In order to ensconce and maintain such unity and stability, Brunei Malay culture has been used as the powerful frame to

influence the construction of national culture. As Malays are the dominant group, Malay culture is promoted as hegemonic and hence the 'natural' basis of national culture.

Brunei society puts great importance upon its tradition as a signifier of Brunei identity and thus much emphasis on upholding it. This tradition is not only revived and preserved, but there have also been measures to (re-)construct 'tradition' so as to fit in ever changing situations. But such reconstruction must not violate the core values of national philosophy, 'Malay Islamic Monarchy', which is also the foundation of the national culture. Such use of reconstructed 'tradition' indicates that Brunei society is receptive to any positive elements that are congruous with the basic principles underlying 'Malay Islamic Monarchy' values. Traditional woven cloth constitutes Brunei traditions whose continuity is significant not only to social and cultural identity, but also to strengthening the political structure. Traditional woven textiles have been significantly used to reproduce and adapt the set of distinctions structuring Brunei society and polity.

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